MAXA'S CHILDREN

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THEY QUICKLY FORMED IN LINE AND IT WAS TRULY A TRIUMPHAL MARCH THEY MADE TO THE SUPPER TABLE, THE BARON ENTHRONED IN HIS CHAIR AT THEIR HEAD

MAXA'S CHILDREN

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MAXA'S CHILDREN

CHAPTER I

IN NOLLA

FOR nearly twenty years the ancient castle had stood on the heights silent and forsaken. Not a sound was to be heard except the twittering of the birds and the rustling of the old pine trees surrounding it. In former days, the swallows darted about the corner turrets on summer evenings, but now no happy faces looked down from the balconies to the green meadows and the laden apple trees in the valley. But at this moment two merry eyes gazed expectantly from the meadow toward the old castle as though able to see through the closely fastened shutters.

"Mea," suddenly called the spy excitedly, "come quick; it is opening!" and Mea, seated under the great apple tree, put down her book and came running.

"See, now it is moving!" continued her brother in still greater agitation. "It's the arm of a black coat! Now he will push the shutter open!"

At this moment a dark object soared up to the tower.

"It was only a bird—a big blackbird," said the disappointed Mea. "This is about the twentieth time you've called me to see how the window shutters are opening, and they never do. I'm not coming again, call as many times as you like."

"They will open some time, I know," asserted the lad firmly, "only we don't know just when. It may occur any day. If only obstinate old Trius would answer us! He knows all about what's going on up there, but the old growler hardly speaks a word. And when one gets close enough to him to talk, he goes for one with his stick. He's certainly determined we shall not know what is going on up there, but everyone in school knows a ghost wanders about and moans through the pine trees. I think old Trius might explain what is going on there!"

"There is nothing to it," answered Mea. "Mother has said so a number of times, and she doesn't want you to talk about the ghost to the school children or try to find out what they know about it. And you must call the castle-guardian Mr. Trius, not just Trius, mother wishes it!"

"Yes, I'll call him Mr. Trius, but I'll make up a song that will describe him—let him just wait!" exclaimed Kurt threateningly.

"But he's not to blame that there's no ghost of Wildenstein that he can talk about," remarked Mea.

"He has plenty to tell us," declared Kurt warmly. "The most wonderful things have happened in that thousand-year-old castle. He knows them all and could tell us, but the only way he answers our questions is to give us a drubbing. Of course you know, Mea, I don't believe in ghosts and spirits and such. But it is so interesting to imagine there is an ancient Baron von Wallerstaetten who tramps around on the battlements in full armor or stands under the old pines and gazes down into the valley with wild eyes and threatening mien. Oh, just to be able to fight him, or to call out to him that I'm not afraid!"

"Oh, you'd run away quick enough if the knight in armor came near you," said Mea. "It's easy to be fearless when one is so far away from the horror as you are here."

"*I* run away from a ghost? Ha ha!" Kurt laughed. "You don't know me! The ghost

would be more likely to run away from me if I screamed at him good and loud! I'll make up a song about him; then we'll go up and sing it before him. My school chums must go with me. You'll come along, Mea, and see how we will shout and sing to the ghost so that he will creep away in fright."

"But if there is no ghost, Kurt, how can it creep away?" asked Mea. "With all your talk of fighting it, you'll soon begin to think there really is a ghost in Wildenstein."

"All this is just to prove there is none, understand that, Mea," declared Kurt. "If there was a ghost, when we challenged him he would charge upon us, panting with rage. But you will see whether or not he comes out. A great triumph for me will follow, for the school and all the neighborhood will see that I have proven there is no ghost wandering restlessly around Wildenstein."

"No, I will not see it, for I'll not come. Mother does not want us to have anything to do with ghost stories—you know that very well. There comes Elvira! I must talk to her!" and Mea darted down the mountainside.

A girl of Mea's age came slowly climbing up.

Whether her measured pace was natural or used to preserve the lovely red and blue flowers on her little hat, which certainly could not stand much shaking, was not quite clear. But it was evident the newcomer did not intend to change her gait, in spite of the fact that she must have seen her friend hurrying toward her.

"She might put her proud little legs into quicker motion when she sees Mea running to meet her," muttered enraged Kurt. "Mea shouldn't do so. But I'll make up a song that will give the haughty Elvira something to think about!"

Kurt now ran off to the garden where his mother was pruning her little rose bush. He often wished he might find his mother alone so he could talk to her, but this seldom happened. Now Kurt dashed toward the garden to take full advantage of this unusual opportunity. But again he failed in his purpose, for just before he reached his mother's side a woman appeared from the other direction and began an earnest conversation. If anyone else had caused this interruption it would have called forth Kurt's rage. But beside being his old friend, Mrs. Apollonie was acquainted with the old castle-

guardian, and Kurt always hoped she would tell him what was happening there. Now as he came up to the two he heard Mrs. Apollonie say, "No, no, Mrs. Pastor, old Trius opens no windows without a reason; for the last twenty years he has not opened a single one."

"So much the more reason for him to wipe away the dust; it certainly needs it," replied Kurt's mother. "I don't believe his master is home."

"Why then were the tower windows opened—the tower in which the master always lived? *Something* has happened," said Mrs. Apollonie significantly.

"Perhaps the ghost of Wildenstein pushed them open," interrupted Kurt.

"Now, Kurt, can't you stop bringing up this story, which is entirely the creation of people who are not content with a calamity as it really happens but must always invent some additional horror?" said his mother forcibly. "You know this idle talk pains me and that I want you to have absolutely nothing to do with it in any way."

"But, mother, I only wish to help you root out this superstition," Kurt assured her. "I want to

show the people there is no ghost in Wildenstein."

"Yes, yes, if we did not know how the brothers—"

"Apollonie," interrupted the pastor's widow, "you least of all should uphold belief in these apparitions. Everybody knows you lived in the castle over twenty years and thinks you know what is going on there. You realize there is no basis for all this talk."

Mrs. Apollonie only shrugged her shoulders slightly and said no more.

"But, mother, how did all this talk begin if there was no basis for it?" persisted Kurt, who could not let the matter rest.

"There is no foundation for it," declared his mother. "Not one of those who tell about it has ever seen the apparition with his own eyes. It is always someone who has been told about it and who has in turn passed it along to others who say that something mysterious was seen at the castle. At first the story began because of a very sad occurrence long ago. Later on the story was revived when some believed a similar thing had happened again. This was quite untrue, but all the old stories were retold and the

talk became livelier than ever. But people who know better should take their stand and see that it does not go any further."

"What was the sad event that happened once and then again?" inquired Kurt, his eyes shining with eagerness to hear the story.

"This is no time for telling it, Kurt," replied the mother with determination. "You have your school lessons to prepare and I have work to do. When I have you all quietly around me some evening, I will tell you about those past days. It will be better for you to know than for you to ponder every rumor that floats about. Now come along, Apollonie, and I will give you the plants you desire. I am glad you want to transplant some of my geraniums. Your little flower garden is always kept in such order it's a pleasure to look upon it."

"Yes, yes, Mrs. Pastor, the cultivation of flowers is a lovely work," she said, nodding her head. "They always respond, and if a plant grows a little to one side, I put a stick beside it and it grows just as it ought. Ah, if only the child were like that, I would be free from care! But she has her own ideas and no one knows where her queer notions come from."

"There is no harm in her having her own ideas," replied the pastor's widow. "The only question is what kind of ideas are they. To me Loneli appears a very well-behaved child. What special notions does she have?"

"Well, you see, I never know what she may do," said Apollonie eagerly. "Yesterday she came from school and said with eyes aglow, 'Grandma, I would like to go to Spain where beautiful flowers of all colors grow and grapes hang in shining clusters. Yes, I would like to go there at once!' Just think of this from a ten-year-old child! What is one to expect next from her?"

"There is really nothing so very terrible about that, Apollonie," smiled the widow. "Is it not likely the child heard you mention Spain in a way that set her imagination to work? Or she may have heard about that country in school, and her lively desire to visit it is only a sign that she listens attentively. You surely ought to allow her the small pleasure of thinking how she could go; there is no danger in that. I agree that children should be held under control or they may form bad habits and no one loves such children. But Loneli is not that kind by any

means; we all love her, and there is no child in Nolla I would rather have as the companion of my children."

Apollonie's honest face brightened. "That is a great consolation, and assuredly I need it," she asserted. "How many tell me that a woman so old as I am has no ability to train and manage a little child! If they can truly say later on that I have spoiled my daughter's child, it will be the death of me. But so long as you are glad to have her with your children, matters cannot be so bad, I am sure. I thank you with my whole heart!" Then taking the great bunch of flower cuttings she continued, "If I can help you in any way, just call on me," and carrying her armful of tender plants carefully, she hurried toward the castle height.

Thoughtfully the pastor's widow gazed after her. Apollonie was connected with her earliest childhood impressions as well as with her youth. Therefore her presence always brought numerous memories to Mrs. Maxa's mind. Since her husband's death when she had left the parsonage down in the valley and had returned to her old home, she was always called Mrs. Maxa by her friends, to distinguish her from the wife of

the present pastor of the village. As a little child she had been in the habit of seeing Apollonie visit her parents' house. At that time the mistress of the castle, Baroness von Wallerstaetten, had many occasions to consult the pastor. Apollonie, then a young girl, acted as her messenger and was always greeted with pleasure at the parsonage. Proving quick, able and thorough in all her work, the young Apollonie was entrusted with one task and then another at the castle, the Baroness undertaking little without her advice and aid. The growing children claimed her services on every possible occasion for she was always ready to do anything and everything they desired. For many years the devoted, faithful servant belonged so entirely to the castle that she came to be called Castle-Apollonie.

Mrs. Maxa was interrupted in her present reverie by loud and repeated cries of "Mama, mama!" and two noisy little children stood before her. "The teacher read to us from a newspaper. It said—" began the boy.

"May I, too? May I, too?" interrupted the girl.

"Mazli," said the mother, "let Lippo finish.

Otherwise I cannot understand what it is you want."

"Mama, the teacher read to us from a news-

paper. It stated in the paper that at Sils-on-the-Mountain—"

"May I, too? May I, too?" again interrupted Mazli.

"Now, Mazli, be quiet until Lippo has finished," her mother commanded.

"But he has said the same thing twice and

takes so long to do it! There has been a fire at Sils-on-the-Mountain and something has to be sent to the people. May I, too? May I, too?" said Mazli, pouring all the story out in a single breath.

"You have not reported it correctly; you have not started from the beginning," said Lippo, much provoked. "One must not begin in the middle of things—the teacher has often said so. Now I will tell it correctly, mama. The teacher has read to us from a newspaper—"

"We really know that, Lippo," remarked his mother. "What was in the paper?"

"It stated in the newspaper that at Sils-on-the-Mountain a conflagration destroyed two houses and everything in them was burned. The teacher said he wished every pupil in all the classes—"

"May I, too? May I, too?" urged Mazli, impatiently.

"Finish, Lippo, but be a little quicker about it," said the mother.

"Then the teacher said every pupil in all the classes should bring some clothes so that the children burned out of home—"

"May I, too? May I, too, mama? May I go

at once and gather together everything they must have?" burst out Mazli as though the last moment for action had arrived.

"Yes, you may give some of your clothes, and Lippo may bring some of his," said the mother. "Later I will help you select what to send, for there is plenty of time. Tomorrow is Sunday, and the children will not take their things to the teacher before Monday for he will surely want to forward them himself."

Lippo endorsed this plan and was about to repeat the exact words in which the teacher had invited the classes to contribute, but he did not get that far, for Kurt came running up and exclaimed in so loud a voice that it drowned out all others, "Mother, I forgot to tell you Bruno will not be home for supper. The pastor is taking him and two other boys for a climb to Upper Ems and he said they will not be home until nine o'clock."

The mother looked a little disturbed and said, "Are the other two his schoolmates, the Knippel boys?"

Kurt nodded.

"I hope everything goes all right," she said. "But every time those three are together out-

side of school hours they quarrel. When we came here I was so glad Bruno could be friends with them, but now I am in continual fear when they are together."

"If you had known the pair you would never have rejoiced at the friendship, mother," Kurt assured her. "Whenever those boys can do anyone harm, they always do it, and it is always behind people's backs. And Bruno is just like a full powder-horn—just one spark and he explodes."

"Let us go indoors," said the mother as she took her two youngest by the hand. Kurt followed as they went into the house, for it had not escaped him how his mother's face had clouded after his words, and he did not like to see her worried.

"Mother, there's no reason to be uneasy," he said with confidence. "They will pay back in double measure anything Bruno does to them, but it will be in some underhanded manner, for they are afraid to tackle him openly."

"Do you think that can console me, Kurt?" she asked.

Kurt quickly realized he had offered no comfort, but he had to say something, for in every

evil he always found some good. He saw such an advantage now and continued, "You know, mother, when Bruno has thundered himself out, all is well again. He's like a gun-barrel that has just been cleaned—all tidy and peaceful. That is surely better than when one lets things cling, is it not?"

Mea was standing at the open window and now beckoned as they approached to tell them that supper was ready long ago. In a flash Kurt was by her side and informed her that when everything was quiet and the younger children tucked into bed his mother would relate the story of Castle Wallerstaetten. "Mark my words, we shall hear about the ghost of Wildenstein; that's what pleases me most," he concluded. But Kurt had miscalculated. The little ones had been put to bed, the last school lessons finished and it had been quiet ever so long. But Bruno had not yet returned. Over and over again the mother glanced uneasily at the clock.

"You must not be anxious, mother. They'll not quarrel because the pastor is with them," said Kurt consolingly.

Hurried steps outside were now heard, the

door was flung open and Bruno rushed in, white with anger. "Those two low-down rascals, those malicious scamps! Those treacherous hypocrites! The—the—!"

"No more, Bruno, no more!" interrupted his mother. "You are beside yourself. Come, sit down and when you are calm tell us what happened, but without using such abusive language."

Quite a time elapsed before Bruno could relate what had occurred without another outbreak of anger. It finally appeared that the castle of Upper Ems had been mentioned during the school session, and the pastor had asked his pupils if they had ever explored the ruins. "None of us had done so," said Bruno, "and so he invited us to walk up there. It is some distance and after we had carefully inspected the ruins, the pastor took us to the nearest inn for a treat. It was dark by the time we reached the village street, and where the footpath crosses the street coming from the great farm, Loneli came running along with a full milk-pitcher in her hand. Edwin Knippel tripped her and she pitched down full length, and the milk ran along the street in a white stream. The two boys

nearly choked with laughter, but I was able to give Edwin a good box on the ears. The coward!" exploded Bruno. "He ran off to the pastor who was in advance of us and had seen nothing. Loneli went on her way without a word, crying to herself. Both those boys ought to have been given a right good—"

"Yes, and Loneli is sure to get a great scolding from her grandmother when she gets home because she spilled the milk," broke in Mea. "She always thinks Loneli to blame when anyone harms her, and is punished for the slightest fault."

"And she never defends herself," said Kurt quite savagely but in evident pity. "Those two boys should just tackle Clevi once; they'd soon get scratched! Apollonie has brought up Loneli all wrong."

"Kurt, would you like to see Loneli jump at a boy and scratch him in the face?" asked his mother.

After a little thought Kurt replied, "No, perhaps not."

"Don't you like Loneli because she is never rough, but always friendly and agreeable and cheerful? Her grandmother loves her dearly;

she is a very honorable woman and anxious to bring her up just right. I should be sorry if she blames the child for what the ill-bred youngsters did, and Apollonie would regret it too if

she hears just how Loneli happened to spill the milk."

"Then I'll run over at once and explain it to her," suggested Kurt, but his mother declared both grandmother and child would probably be in bed and asleep.

"And now are we going to have the story of Castle Wildenstein?" Kurt asked. But the

mother had already risen and was pointing to the old wall clock, and to his great disappointment Kurt saw it was far beyond their usual bedtime.

CHAPTER II

SUNDRY TROUBLES

BEFORE going to church next morning, Mrs. Maxa stepped into the living-room and found Bruno and Mea each deeply absorbed in a book, Kurt with his drawings before him, and Lippo and Mazli building a beautiful city with churches, towers and great palaces at their little table. The mother was satisfied and departed. Everything was quiet for a while, then a ray of sunlight fell across Kurt's drawing. He looked up and saw the meadow bathed in sunshine.

"Those two mischievous milk-spillers of yesterday deserve to be locked up this whole sunny day!" he exploded.

Mea gave a lively assent, and the two again expressed their rage at the evil-doers and their sympathy for Loneli. Bruno remained silent over his book, but the conversation interested Mazli and she left Lippo to set up the blocks as he pleased, and only returned to her play when the discussion ended.

"Good gracious, what have I forgotten!" ex-

claimed Kurt, suddenly jumping up from his drawing. "You might have reminded me, Mea! We have to take some clothes to the teacher tomorrow for the people who were burned out, and mother knows nothing about it."

"Mother knows about it; I told her at once," declared Lippo. "Why, the teacher told us we must not forget!"

"Quite right, you perfect little student!" and Kurt returned to his drawing. As his mother knew about the matter he had no further reason to bother.

But it set Mazli to thinking. Toppling over house, towers and churches, she said, "Come along quick, Lippo! We have something to do that is much more jolly and mother will be pleased about it."

In spite of Mazli's impatience, Lippo laid each block in the box in order.

"That will take an hour!" said impatient Mazli. "Just throw everything in and put on the cover."

"Nobody should do that," replied Lippo earnestly. "I must put each block in its proper place."

"Then I shall run away without you," Mazli

informed him as she whisked through the door.

When Lippo had packed the box in perfect order he ran after Mazli, wondering what she had in hand. She was not in the passage nor in the garden; she was nowhere to be found. He shouted; no answer. At last he heard a peculiarly subdued reply which he traced to Mazli's bedroom. There she sat on the floor, clothes heaped around her, her head buried deep in the wardrobe as she pulled out more things.

"You are surely doing a fine thing for Sunday morning," said he as he stared with startled eyes at the confusion.

"This is doing good," declared Mazli. "Kurt says one must take out all the clothes one does not need any more and lay them together to be sent to those burned out of house and home. Mama will be pleased because she won't have anything more to do, and they can all be sent off early in the morning. Bring along your clothes too, and lay them in a heap."

The plan was a doubtful one to Lippo. It seemed to him it might not be exactly according to his mother's idea. "When we wish to do anything with our clothes we must always ask mama first," he remarked.

Mazli made no answer, only pulled out a pile of heavy woolen stockings and a thick winter coat.

"No, I won't help," decided Lippo after further survey of the unusual scene.

"You won't because it makes too much work," asserted Mazli, her face flushed with exertion. "But I will help you when I am through here."

"I really won't do it," repeated Lippo, now

quite determined. "I won't because we are not allowed."

Mazli had not time to argue; she was groping around for the thick shoes that must be somewhere in the wardrobe. But before she found them, the door opened and their mother looked in at the devastation.

"My children, what frightful disorder!" she exclaimed. "And on Sunday morning! What has happened? What is the meaning of this clothing-store on the floor?"

"Now you see, Mazli!" said Lippo, highly gratified at this proof that he had been right. But Mazli tried to convince her mother she had only wanted to help, so she would have nothing to do but send off the clothes.

Her mother explained very emphatically she must never try to assist in that way again; that she was unable to judge what clothes she still needed and what could be given away; that such help only made double work for mother. "Besides, Mazli," she concluded, "I notice your greatest eagerness is to get rid of clothes you dislike. The woolen things you say scratch your skin seem to be the ones you would like to give away. Is it not so?"

"Perhaps those children would like to wear them rather than be cold," suggested Mazli.

"Oh, mama, Mrs. Knippel is coming up the road to our house; she is certainly coming here!" announced Lippo who was standing near the window.

"And I still have on my things!" said the mother, a little upset. "Go, Mazli, greet Mrs. Knippel and take her into the front room. Tell her I am coming immediately; that I have only just come from church."

Mazli ran off gleefully, for the mission was just to her liking. She politely welcomed the caller, led her to the sofa in the front room, asked her to be seated, just as she knew her mother always did, and then she delivered her mother's message.

"Good, very good! And what are you going to do this lovely Sunday afternoon?" asked the lady.

"Go for a walk," answered Mazli quickly. "Are they still locked up?"

"Who? Whom do you mean?" and Mrs. Knippel looked at her a little reprovingly.

"Edwin and Eugene," answered the child unabashed.

"Where did you get such an idea?" asked the lady with rising emotion. "Why should they be locked up?"

"Because they did so much harm to Loneli," Mazli explained just as her mother entered and greeted her guest.

"I am wondering, Mrs. Maxa," the visitor began in a curt tone, "what wickedness this little poison-toad Loneli has schemed and told about my boys. I am wondering still more that people of whom one would expect more should believe it."

"As you already know of the affair, I'll relate what happened, for you seem to be falsely informed. It is not any wickedness on Loneli's part. Mazli," broke off the mother, "go along to the other children and stay until I come."

Mazli departed very slowly for she hoped to hear the news before reaching the door, but she was disappointed.

After Mrs. Maxa had related the truth as to the occurrence the evening before, Mrs. Knippel said, "That is only a child's prank! All children trip one another for fun, and we should not look upon it as a big fault. It is not worth the trouble of reproaching them for it."

"I am not of that opinion, Mrs. Knippel," said Mrs. Maxa. "This kind of a prank borders on the rough, and such acts soon grow into cruelty. Loneli has been hurt, and that is going beyond fun."

"As I said," repeated the district attorney's wife, "it is not worth the trouble of losing a lot of words over. Too much to-do is made over this child and her grandmother. Apollonie still remembers she has been called Castle-Apollonie and holds her head high on that account. The child will soon do so too. But I came to talk over something vastly more important."

It appeared Mrs. Knippel and her husband had concluded it was time their sons were sent to the city in order to enter the high school. So far the pastor's teaching had been good enough, but now they had outgrown him and needed more advanced work. So when autumn came it would be best for all three boys to live in the same boarding-house, for of course Bruno would go too. Since they would have prominent places in the little village when grown to manhood, it would be well for public affairs in general if they had the same education and entertained the same views.

"My husband is planning to go to the city soon to find a suitable boarding-house," said the caller finally. "You would surely like him to find a place for Bruno and so save you the trouble of doing so."

Mrs. Maxa's heart sank at these words. Already she could picture the unhappy results arising from these three boys living under one roof.

"It is very painful to think of sending Bruno away from home so soon," she said at last. "Neither do I see the necessity for it. Our pastor expected to continue to instruct the boys until a year from next spring. They can really learn much from him yet. Of course if you are determined to send your sons away, I must think about the same plan for Bruno, as I cannot expect the pastor to carry on the lessons for only one," and added that she would have to discuss the whole matter with her brother, who was her advisor as well as the guardian of her children.

Mrs. Knippel was not altogether satisfied, saying she considered a mother had the right to settle such a question, and she wished to close the matter then and there. "The boys have

sufficient sense to behave properly without our presence," she added. "At least my two boys have, I am sure, and where two take the right course, a third will do likewise."

"Bruno is not one who follows," replied Mrs. Maxa forcibly. "Neither do I wish him to do so, even in this case. I will keep him at home as long as I possibly can and when that cannot be, then I will send him forth under God's protection."

"As you will!" said Mrs. Knippel, rising. "The question of board can be discussed later on," she remarked as she departed. "When the time arrives, I am sure you will welcome my husband's plans."

When the mother returned to the living-room after seeing her caller off, Mazli called out, "Did she tell you if the two are still locked up?"

"What are you imagining, Mazli?" asked her mother.

"Oh, you provoking, impudent child!" Kurt laughed. "Because I said they ought to be locked up, you run and put the question to their mother."

Mrs. Maxa now understood how her caller knew about her sons' behavior of yesterday.

"Mazli, never forget again that you must not ask questions of grown-up people who visit me," she said.

"But what are the locked-up children going to do?" asked Mazli in a tone of great pity.

"Now sly Mazli wants to soften mother's heart with a show of sympathy," remarked Kurt.

"Uncle Phipp! Uncle Phipp!" suddenly burst from every throat and the noisy group rushed outdoors. Mrs. Maxa too hurried to greet her only brother who lived on an estate in Sils valley. He had been away on a short journey and therefore had not been in Nolla for several weeks.

"You see, Maxa, I haven't a hand left for you," her brother called, "but I greet you just as heartily with a nod of the head."

"No, I want your hand," replied Mrs. Maxa, "God be with you, Philip! Did you have a pleasant and successful journey?"

"All went well! Now forward, march, you young people! I want to take off my overcoat," the uncle ordered. "It is so full of heavy things it is dragging me down."

Still shouting with joy, the five pulled and

pushed him into the house. Once inside, however, Mrs. Maxa declared they must sit down to dinner as it was long past the usual hour and all else could easily be put off until afternoon. The next difficult problem was who should sit next to Uncle Phipp. That was a momentous decision, for whoever sat next to him could talk to him most easily. Today the uncle decided in favor of the two youngest, and they led him triumphantly to the inviting table. That was a merry dinner, for the children never wearied of listening to the jolly stories Uncle Phipp told about his trip. However, when the cake, a special Sunday treat, had been served, Mazli showed unmistakable signs of impatience.

"Such an inquisitive snubnose must not be kept in suspense too long," remarked the Uncle. "Let's have a look at the overcoat."

Mazli had already jumped from her chair and caught hold of his hand, to keep as close as possible while he emptied those big pockets. What beautiful red books came out first! They were for Bruno and Kurt.

"That's for mama's darning!" exclaimed Mazli, watching her uncle intently as he pulled out a dainty workbox.

"Mother will get a present, but this is for Mea, who is rapidly becoming a young lady, when she goes visiting her friends."

"Oh, how lovely, how lovely!" cried the delighted Mea. "If only you had brought the friends along—it is very difficult to find them here."

"I promise to the next time, Mea, but I had no room in my overcoat today," said the uncle. "Now here comes the main item!" and he drew a large package from each pocket. "These are for the youngsters," he explained, "but don't get them changed by mistake. One holds stamping chargers and the other little steaming pots. Which belongs to Mazli?"

"The stamping chargers," the little girl said quickly.

"Don't you believe it! Here, unpack them and then you'll see," said the uncle.

Lippo took the other package and the two children ran over to their little table, but Mazli suddenly paused when halfway there.

"Uncle Phipp," she called eagerly, "has mama received something too—something pretty? May I see it?"

"Yes, something lovely," answered Uncle

Phipp, "but I have not given it to her yet. It cannot be seen, only heard."

"Oh, a piano!" Mazli shouted.

"No, Mazli, one could see that," said the uncle. "You cannot guess, but it will all come out when the little birds are tucked in their nests and everything is quiet."

Mazli ran over to the play table and as she lifted out the shining copper kettles, frying pans, and cooking pots, she forgot all about the stamping chargers. She dug in her box with growing astonishment for new wonders kept coming to light. Lippo's eyes beamed as he set up his pretty saddled steeds and seated the groom in a red jacket on one after the other. To his delight he found the groom fitted into every saddle, sitting upright and immovable whether the steed trotted or galloped.

Uncle Phipp grew restless during the silence that followed the distribution of his gifts, for the children were absorbed with their new possessions, and finally he called them together, saying he wished to take a walk. Mazli was ready in a moment, for she tossed her new toys into the box and with a little pressure pushed down the lid.

"You must not do that, you really must not!" Lippo called after her, but she was already outdoors. The other children were ready too as they had only to put away a single thing, but the mother tarried to give her orders to Kathy, the cook.

"Come along, Lippo; no straggling behind!" called out the uncle.

"I have to finish first, then I'll be there immediately," he explained.

Now the mother came out and asked, "Where is Lippo?" as she mustered her little troop.

"He sits in there like a mole in its hole and won't come out," said Kurt. "Shall I fetch him? Then he'll come out pretty quick!"

"No, no, I'll attend to it," said the mother and went indoors.

There Lippo sat at his little table putting one horse after the other slowly in the box.

"Come, come, Lippo, we must not keep uncle waiting," remonstrated the mother.

"But one must not leave until everything is put in place and in the closet," said Lippo. "One must pack up things orderly."

"Yes, that is true! Come, I'll help you," and the mother rendered quick assistance, for she

had herself given the instructions Lippo was obeying so faithfully.

"Here he comes at last, the slow-poke!" called out Kurt.

"You must not blame him," said the mother. "He wished to do what is right, putting everything in order before taking a walk."

"Bravo, my godson! That is my baptismal gift. But come, we must be off," said Uncle Phipp, stretching out his hand. "Where shall we go?"

"Up to the castle!" quickly suggested Kurt.

"Perhaps we had better say in the direction of the castle," remarked the uncle as he took the lead with his two little companions. "We will have to say around the castle, won't we? If the savage Mr. Trius still keeps watch, we will not get to the top, because the castle estate is fenced in."

"Oh, we can go a long way up the road, as far as the castle gates," said lively Kurt. "From there you can look into the overgrown garden. On the right is a wooden fence that is easily climbed, and then one can run up the fields to the white thorn thicket. On the other side the underbrush begins and then one soon comes to

the wood with the old fir trees and pines. We can't climb over that. One could easily get to the castle from the woods."

"You seem to have pretty exact knowledge of the estate," remarked Uncle Phipp. "But what has Mr. Trius to say about climbing fences? There are some beautiful apple trees in those fields!"

"When he catches anyone he clubs him, even if he is not after apples. He strikes at anyone he sees even near the hedge."

"No doubt he wants to show people who nose around there that they must not climb over. Let us wait for your mother." Uncle Phipp turned to look for his sister who had lingered behind with Bruno and Mea. "In which direction do we go now? You know the paths up here best," he said to his sister as the three approached.

Mrs. Maxa declared he knew all the little paths around the castle even better than she did. But if she had to decide their way, she would propose the heights to the left where one had a free view of the castle.

"Then we'll pass Apollonie's cottage," said Kurt. "That's good, for then we can learn how

Loneli managed yesterday's difficulty. She is the nicest child in school."

"All right," the uncle agreed, "I'll be glad to see my old friend, Mrs. Apollonie. Forward!"

They soon reached the cottage at the foot of the hill. The old apple tree in the corner of the garden cast a deep shade over the little wooden bench where sat grandmother and granddaughter, both in neat Sunday attire and each with a book. The delicate fragrance of rosemary and mignonette filled the air.

"A true Sunday peace rests on everything. Come and look, Maxa," Uncle Phipp called as he looked over the low hedge into the garden. "Here the roses and mignonette; there Apollonie in spotless cap and bright apron, with the apple-cheeked granddaughter in her neat little dress."

Loneli had just noticed the party on the other side of the hedge, and darted from her bench to greet Kurt and Mea, who were her particular friends.

Now Apollonie recognized the group and came up beaming with joy, determined they should all come into her garden to rest. She eagerly began to fetch chairs and benches, but Mrs. Maxa objected, saying they wished to climb the heights,

THE OLD APPLE TREE CAST A DEEP SHADE OVER THE LITTLE WOODEN BENCH.

and the time was too short if they did not proceed at once. They had just stopped to exchange greetings and to see her attractive garden.

"How beautifully you keep everything, Apollonie!" said Uncle Phipp. "This miniature garden is as lovely as the great one at the castle used to be—the roses and mignonette, the cabbages, beans and turnips, the little spring in the corner and the bench under the wide-spreading apple tree."

"Mr. Falk has to have his joke," replied Apollonie. "Almost prettier than the rose beds up there, are they? Ah, for the like of them! And for my vegetable garden in those days! Such beds of cauliflower, and whole forests of bean poles! And then my lettuce beds and my rows of young peas! Such a vegetable garden needed some management; there will never be the like of it again! How often I look up at the castle and sigh as I think that so much beauty should be lost forever!"

"Yes, but nobody could help that," said Uncle Philip. "But you have one advantage. Here in your quiet garden no one comes to disturb your Sunday peace. No youngster jumps into the middle of your vegetable beds so that you

have to throw up your hands and exclaim, 'That Falk boy is the worst of all!' "

"You still remember that?" asked Apollonie. "Yes, those three young gentlemen trod down a lot of my vegetables, but how gladly I would endure it all if I could only care for those beds once again! But they are no more! Mr. Trius harvests only hay and apples—he has let all the rest go. But Mr. Falk must not suppose I live in absolute peace because no boys trample my garden. Far from it! When I would like to read my Sunday hymn in peace, I have to swallow real pain-and-tribulation soup on Saturday, which still sticks in my throat on Sunday."

"You mean the Knippel-soup of yesterday, Apollonie, do you not?" broke in Kurt. Loneli had just told him things had not gone well when she returned home with her soiled clothes and empty milk bottle. He felt so savage about it he had quickly understood Apollonie's meaning. "Well, Loneli was not to blame—not a little bit! The Knippel boys thought it funny to put a foot out so that she would tumble and spill the milk she was carrying."

"The child could not have behaved as she

should or the district attorney's sons would never have harmed her."

"I'll just fetch Bruno; he can prove to you that Loneli had done nothing. He was there!" cried Kurt eagerly, and would have run after his brother who had gone on, but his mother restrained him. She wished to avoid another outbreak of anger and one would surely occur if he discovered Loneli was held blameworthy. So she herself recounted what Bruno had reported to her and Loneli's eyes gleamed with pleasure, for her grandmother would accept Mrs. Maxa's word above that of all others.

"Now you can see Loneli was not to blame," said Kurt as his mother concluded.

"Yes, and I am so glad it is so," said Apollonie. "But who would believe that boys with such a good education would hurt anyone without reason? Young Falk would never have done so; *he* ran across my vegetable beds because the young masters of the castle chased him."

Uncle Phipp laughed: "Mrs. Apollonie is quite right! When she gave young Falk a good scolding, she knew very well he did not trample the vegetables out of mischief but only to save

himself. Now I think it time we move along," and he gave his aged acquaintance a hearty handshake and went off with the two youngsters, who had never left his side for a single moment.

They soon reached the height from which they could view the castle as it gleamed in the slanting rays of sunshine. Silence reigned about the gray pile. The old pines beneath the corner tower trailed their long branches on the earth, for no hand had disturbed them for many years. Where the blooming garden had been was a tangled mass of weeds and bushes.

The grown-ups seated themselves on a fallen tree trunk and gazed silently toward the castle, while the children searched the sunny slope for strawberries.

"It certainly looks lonesome and desolate over there," said Uncle Phipp after a while. "Let's go back. When the sun is gone it will look still more gloomy."

"Doesn't something attract your special notice?" asked his sister. "Don't you see that all the shutters are firmly bolted except on the window in the tower? You know who used to live in that room."

"Certainly I remember! It was there the raving Bruno dwelt," her brother answered.

"As his room alone seems to be in order, do you think he has returned?"

"What are you thinking of? He will never return!" exclaimed Uncle Phipp. "You know we heard some time ago that he was sick unto death in Malaga. Mr. Tillman heard that when traveling in Spain, and he must surely know. The restless Bruno is long since dead; why look for him here?"

"But we would have heard something about it, and a new owner of the castle would have appeared," Mrs. Maxa argued. "There are two young Wallerstaettens, as you know; the children of Salo and Leonore. What then has become of them? The estate would go to them on the death of the uncle."

"They are long since disinherited," explained the brother. "I do not know where they are, but I have an idea and will tell you when we are alone this evening, and your mind is free from the worry of watching your lively brood," for Mrs. Maxa was busy keeping an eye on them all, lest Kurt grow too daring in his climbing, Mazli wander too far and Lippo fill his pockets with

strawberries and damage his Sunday clothes.

"You worry far too much over your children," continued Uncle Phipp. "Let them grow up, simply saying to them, 'If you are not good you will be locked up.' "

"That *would* be the simplest way," agreed his sister. "It's a pity you do not have a brood to bring up, Philip, as full of life as mine and each different from the others. I have to drive one to do the thing that I have to restrain another from doing. Cares come without my seeking them. Today brought a new trouble which you alone are able to ease."

Mrs. Maxa now told her brother of Mrs. Knippel's visit, and of the problem Bruno's education offered because she could not think of letting the lad go away to school with the two Knippel boys. Never yet had the three been together without some wickedness on the part of the two brothers bringing an angry outburst from Bruno. "Shouldn't that be a source of great worry with the three living under the same roof, Phipp?" asked Mrs. Maxa.

"That's an old story, Maxa," answered the brother earnestly. "Boys have always fought and then made peace again."

"No, Phipp, that brings me no consolation," replied his sister. "It has never been Bruno's way to fight, but what he might do in a fit of anger over some injustice or underhanded wickedness strikes terror to my heart."

"He inherited that with his godfather's name. No one but you, Maxa, could excuse his godfather's fits of rage or try to whitewash his deeds. With your undying esteem—"

Uncle Phipp got no further as all the children now came running up and mother and uncle rose from their seats and began the descent. The two youngest children claimed their place beside Uncle Phipp, bursting into joyful shouts when he made such leaps that they flew up into the air. However, he held them so firmly that they always landed safely.

"Oh, mama," Kurt proposed on arriving home, "let's have the story of the Wallerstaettens this evening. It just suits the occasion, for we have had the castle right before us this afternoon."

But once again the mother answered, "No, not today. Uncle is here and he has to leave early in the morning. I have much to talk over with him."

"Oh, what a pity, what a pity!" Kurt lamented for he had hoped the story would reveal something about the ghost of Wildenstein even though one did not believe in it.

That night when the mother went to Mazli's bed for prayers, the little girl sat up and asked, "Why should the Knippel-soup spoil Apollonie's Sunday peace?"

"Now what have you heard, Mazli?" inquired the mother, for already she pictured the moment when Mazli would use that new expression to Mrs. Knippel. "You must never use that term again, Mazli. Kurt invented it on the spur of the moment when Apollonie spoke about having much to swallow. He should not have said it, and you must never repeat it, do you understand?"

"Yes, but why does anyone disturb Apollonie's Sunday peace?" Mazli persisted.

"No one should," replied her mother. "No one should disturb anybody's Sunday peace."

"Could not the dear Lord quickly call down, 'Don't do that!'? Then they would know they should not do it."

"He does just that, Mazli, when anyone is about to do wrong," explained the mother.

"One hears a voice call out quite clearly, 'Don't do it! Don't do it!' Even little children like you hear the voice when about to do something they ought not, and yet they pay no heed."

"It's a wonder to me the Lord does not punish them right away," replied Mazli eagerly.

"He does. Directly a person does wrong it presses on his heart so that he thinks, 'Oh, if I only had not done it!' Then the Lord is so loving and merciful He does not punish him further. He gives him opportunity to say to Him how sorry he is and to beg forgiveness. But if one does not do so, then punishment comes so he grows more unhappy."

"I'll watch to find out if I can hear the voice," resolved Mazli.

"And then obey it; that is the important thing," added her mother. "Now let us be very quiet, while you say your prayer and afterward you will sleep peacefully." And in truth she was already half asleep when the mother closed the door.

After visiting all the other children for a good-night moment, she found Uncle Phipp impatiently pacing the living-room.

"You're here at last? Aren't you a little

curious to know what I've brought you?"

"Ah, Phipp, it will be some kind of joke," replied Mrs. Maxa. "But I would like to hear you explain what you meant about the children of Wallerstaetten."

"All one and the same thing, Maxa. Come, sit here." As he seated himself comfortably beside his sister, he continued, "Just as surely as I am sitting alongside of you, Maxa, three days ago I saw young Leonore Wallerstaetten. At the present moment she is but an hour's distance away and will be for several weeks. I bring you this news as my present."

At first Mrs. Maxa was too astonished to speak. Then, "Are you really sure, Phipp? But how can you be sure the child you saw is Leonore's little daughter?"

"First, because no one who saw Leonore can ever forget how she looked, and this child has all her features. Secondly, because the child is called Leonore and, thirdly, because her brown locks fall over her shoulders as did her mother's, and she has the same voice, so soft and pleasant. Fourthly, fifthly and sixthly, because only Leonore could have such a child; there was no one else like her in the world." In his eager-

ness Uncle Phipp had grown quite ardent.

"Tell me how you came to see the child," urged his sister.

Then he related how, three days before, he had given orders at the city hotel for a coach to take him home to Sils that evening. The hotel-keeper informed him a coach had just been ordered by two ladies to take them to the same place. As they had asked particulars regarding the journey, being ignorant of the road, they surely would be pleased to have him join them. They were introduced to him, the trip was arranged, and when the coach had driven up, he found the ladies had a little girl with them who was to occupy the seat beside him.

"The girl is Leonore's child; I am as sure of that as that I am your brother," he concluded.

Mrs. Maxa was greatly excited and asked a flood of questions, but all her brother knew was that the ladies lived near Hanover; that the little girl was called Leonore; that they had taken a small villa at Sils for the summer. He had shown them his estate, offered his services if they needed them, and bade them good-bye.

The name Leonore brought so many recollections of childhood days that the two talked tire-

lessly of the happy times they had spent at the castle with the unforgettable Leonore and her two cousins. Brother and sister chatted far into the night, yet after good-nights were said, it was hours before sleep came to Mrs. Maxa's eyes. Ever and again Leonore with long brown locks and winning glance rose before her, and ever greater grew her longing to see the child that so closely resembled her.

CHAPTER III

CASTLE WILDENSTEIN

THE next morning when Mrs. Maxa joined the five children gathered about the piano, Kurt said, "Oh, mother, we've forgotten all about the fire victims; we were to take something to school this morning for them."

"Yes, the teacher told us twice not to forget it," lamented Lippo.

"Never mind; I've just sent Kathy off with a basket full of things. It was too heavy for you to carry. Now let us sing our morning hymn," and their mother sat down at the piano. "We cannot wait for uncle; he may be late coming back from his morning stroll."

The older children sang vigorously for they knew the hymn. Mazli sang loudly too, and where she had forgotten the words, made up her own. Two stanzas had been sung when Kurt said, "Now we must have breakfast for soon it will be time for school."

Mrs. Maxa rose, but Lippo pulled her back. "Don't go! We have to finish singing. Come

back, mother, do come back!" he pleaded.

She tried to loosen the boy's hold but his grip was tight and he kept on crying, "Come back! You told us never to leave anything till it was finished. We must sing the entire song."

Now Kurt commanded, "Let go your pinchers! We'll all be late to school!" and Mea also lent her voice to the hubbub.

At this moment Uncle Phipp entered and asked, "What's all this?"

Everybody started to explain, and in his desire to be near his uncle, Lippo let go his mother. When Kurt finally succeeded in making his uncle understand, he said, "Lippo is right: what is started must be finished. That principle ought to be upheld. Lippo has inherited this trait from his godfather, who will stand by him. Come, Lippo, we'll sing the song to the last word."

"But, Uncle Phipp, the song has twelve stanzas and it's high time we leave for school, and Lippo must go with us," Kurt remonstrated. "If the teacher asks why he did not come, I surely cannot say he had to stay at home to finish his morning hymn."

"That is true, and Kurt is right," agreed the

uncle. "But, Lippo, I see a way out. You must make mama promise to sing the hymn to the end this evening. Then after all it will be finished."

"That can't be done," lamented Lippo. "It's a morning hymn, and we can't sing morning hymns at night. It has to be finished now. Wait, Kurt!" he screamed when he saw his brother toss his schoolbag to his shoulder.

"What's to be done now? Where is your mother? Why did she run away at such a moment?" cried Uncle Phipp helplessly. "Call your mother! Things can't go on this way!"

Lippo had run back to the piano and leaning against it began to cry. Kurt threw open the door and called lustily for his mother, though that was unnecessary for she stood just outside, as Bruno had asked her to listen to something that was for her ear alone.

"Do come here, mother!" exclaimed Kurt in a milder tone. "Come, help us put some common sense into Lippo's head! School begins in five minutes."

"It's high time you were here, Maxa," said her brother as she entered. "Do straighten out this boy! There he stands sobbing when he ought to be off to school. Kurt is right."

Seating herself on the piano stool, Mrs. Maxa drew Lippo to her. "Come, son, there is nothing to cry about," she said soothingly. "You see, it is a good thing to finish what you begin but there are some things that cannot be finished at once. We should do all that belongs to each day. Now our song has twelve stanzas. We will sing two each morning. On the sixth day the song will be finished, and so it will not have been left unfinished at all. Do you understand, Lippo?"

"Yes," and he looked up to his mother quite satisfied.

A hasty farewell was said to the uncle, and as the children went down the steps they called back thrice, "Come again soon!"

The mother stood at the window watching them, for she feared the older ones might leave their brother far behind as he was the cause of their being so late. In fact, they were much ahead of him, but what sort of a schoolbag was Lippo carrying on his back?

"Can you think what Lippo has stowed away in his satchel, Phipp?" asked Mrs. Maxa, for the cover of the bag was pushed open by something much too large for the bag. "What can

he be carrying off? Can you see what it is?"

"All I can see is a gray paper package," answered her brother. "Anyhow, there is no harm in it. I must say Lippo is a thoroughly good, obedient youngster and very sensible. Once he has been given the right understanding everything goes all right with him. But how be able always to say the right word to him at the right time?"

His sister smiled. "It is true, then, that rearing children is not altogether simple?"

Suddenly aware that the time for his departure was long since past, Uncle Phipp bade a hurried farewell to his sister but she held him back for a moment. "You will find out to whom the little girl belongs? If your supposition is true, and Leonore's child is near, I certainly must see her; no one could forbid me that!"

"We'll see, we'll see!" he replied and the next moment was gone.

The way the day had begun had taken so much time that Mrs. Maxa had her hands full to complete the necessary work before the four returned from school.

At her mother's bidding, Mazli knitted away on a white cloth that was to have a pretty red

border, to make a duster for Uncle Phipp's desk. Her hands busy with this and her head full of the lively morning proceedings, Mazli had no mischievous inclinations as was usually the case. Her mother's thoughts had no connection with her many tasks, and she paused frequently to gaze absent-mindedly before her. In thought she was in the castle garden, wandering about with her dear Leonore under the soughing pines, singing and chatting merrily. Her brother's news had awakened vivid memories.

Now and again she sighed, for something else disturbed her. Bruno had told her not to wait dinner for him as he would be late; he wanted to frustrate a piece of wickedness his schoolmates had planned. What this plan was and how he would foil it he had not explained, for it was at that moment Kurt had opened the door and called for her in a voice of thunder and she had only time to warn Bruno not to allow his anger to master him.

Even sooner than she expected, Kurt came running up and called to her from the doorway.

"Here I am, Kurt," she said calmly from the living-room where she had just seated herself after the morning's work. "Come into the

room first; your news cannot be that urgent."

Kurt was already by her side and began, "But you know, mother, when we come from school we have to find out where you are. And there is so much to tell today! Now listen! First of all, the teacher thanks you for the gifts for the people at Sils. And he wishes to say that he will put aside the cardboard helmet with the red plume until he finds out why you sent it."

"I don't understand, Kurt."

"Here comes Lippo. He can explain, for he took it to the teacher," said Kurt.

As Lippo came merrily into the room, his mother said, "Tell me, Lippo, did you take something to school this morning in your satchel for the families whose homes were burned?"

"Yes, the helmet Uncle Phipp gave me," answered Lippo.

"Great! You thought that if a poor little chap was shirtless, he could wear a helmet with a red plume," laughed Kurt.

"You needn't laugh so! Mother said we must not send just what we do not want, so I gave the helmet, which I wanted so much for myself."

"Kurt, you really must not laugh at him; that is just what I said. He wished to do good, but

took the wrong way. Lippo, you should have told me and I would have helped you carry out your good intentions. Next time tell me all about it and we will do better working together."

"Yes, mama, I'll do so," promised Lippo.

"Now listen, mother," urged Kurt. "This will not please you any more than it does us. Today Loneli had to sit on the bench of disgrace, but all the class sides with her."

"The poor child! What did she do? Her grandmother will be much upset, the honorable soul; she may even punish Loneli."

"No, she mustn't do that!" declared Kurt. "The teacher told the whole school he hated to put her there for she was a brave and obedient pupil, but he must keep his word. To put an end to the disturbing chatter, he had said the first boy or girl who whispered would be sent to the disgrace-bench. So Loneli had to sit there, and she cried so it made us all sad. You cannot chatter alone, can you? So Loneli should not have had to sit there by herself. But the teacher just asked: 'Who was that chattering? Although only a whisper, I heard it. Who was it?' Then Loneli answered softly, 'I!' And

she was punished. One of her neighbors ought also to have called out 'I!' for one of them must have been talking too."

"Loneli may have asked a question and received no reply," suggested Mrs. Maxa.

"Mea will tell us about that, for when school closed she ran after Loneli. Now something more," continued Kurt. "Two boys in my class got a good clubbing from Mr. Trius this morning. They climbed over the castle hedge to look at the red apples. But Mr. Trius was on hand with his thick stick and in a wink each had a couple Trius blows across the back. Now for my fourth piece of news. Farmer Marx, who lives behind the castle, says last night, a little after twelve o'clock, his father was returning from the big cattle fair and as he came up the valley he saw a large closed coach behind him. It turned into the castle roadway. He is sure it drove up to the castle but not a soul knows who was inside. This time you have listened to me, mother; you're not always so attentive. Farmer Marx told something else about his father but you will be angry if I repeat that."

"Then it is something bad, Kurt."

"No, not bad; only curious, you know; something you do not like to talk about. But as I do not believe the story, I may as well tell it to you. Marx said his father declared there was something wrong about this coach. He got well out of its way for the coachman seemed to have only half a head, and his coat collar was turned up high as though to hide what was beneath it. And he whipped the horses so they galloped all the way up the castle hill and sparks flew from their hoofs."

"How can you repeat such nonsense, Kurt?" said his mother reproachfully. "For on hearing it, some will declare the ghost of Wildenstein is walking again. Every day you can see horses' hoofs strike sparks from stones, and coachmen always turn up their coat collars when the wind is high. It seems to me, Kurt, you still keep busy with this matter in spite of all I have said."

Kurt was glad Mea came in just then, for this very day he had busied himself about this matter in a way that certainly would not please his mother. But he quieted his conscience with the thought that if he proved the whole apparition an idle invention he would be taking his

mother's side and settle the question for all.

"Why are your eyes all swollen with crying?" he asked Mea.

She fought the tears back, and said half angrily, half complainingly, "I wish you knew, mother, how hard it is to stay friends with Elvira! She thinks evil of everything, gets so out of humor, won't say a word, and sulks all the day. If I run up to her to tell her something and happen to bump her just the least, she's insulted, and says I've ruined the flowers on her hat. Then she turns her back on me and will have nothing more to do with me."

"Yes, I've seen it myself!" agreed Kurt. "And yesterday I started a song she ought to hear. Listen, this is it:

ODE TO A WELL-KNOWN YOUNG LADY

I know a maid so fair of face,
Who thinks a noise a great disgrace;
She puts on airs and turns her back,
But silent spite she does not lack."

"You mustn't sing that, Kurt!" Mea exclaimed with new agitation, and her mother added, "Mea is right in not wanting her friend sung of in that style."

"But I am Mea's brother and don't wish to

see her tyrannized over. No true friend would do it," urged Kurt, "and if my song angers her so that the friendship is broken it would be nothing to cry over."

Mea defended her friend passionately until Kurt promised to discontinue the ditty.

And now her mother wished to know what had happened to make such red eyes. She told how she had followed Loneli because she had left the school in tears. The little girl told her that Elvira, who sat beside her, asked if she was going to the Sils church festival and she had answered no. Then Elvira asked why not, whereupon Loneli told her she would explain after school; they must not whisper then. At that instant the teacher put the question and Loneli confessed.

"Now, mother, don't you think Elvira should have said she asked Loneli a question? Then the teacher would certainly not have sent Loneli to the disgrace-bench, or he might have given both of them some other punishment," said Mea excitedly.

"So *she* sent Loneli to the disgrace-bench!" Kurt interrupted. "Loneli is my friend, so Elvira will get some more of my verses."

"Elvira certainly ought to have done that," agreed her mother.

"Well, just listen to what happened then," continued Mea even more eagerly. "I ran away from Loneli to catch up with Elvira, but I could still hear Loneli sobbing that she was afraid to go home as she would have to tell her grandmother, who was sure to punish her for having been disgraced. I overtook Elvira and told her it wasn't right that she had not confessed. But she was only angry with me and said I was a nice friend, that I would be glad

if she also would have to sit on the disgrace-bench. She should not have said that to me, should she, mother? I told her that while the matter was over for her, it was not for Loneli and that therefore she ought to tell the teacher how it had happened. Then he could say something to the school and the children might know that, having only promised to answer after school hours, Loneli did not deserve punishment. But Elvira grew more angry and said if I wished to continue preaching I must seek another friend, and turned and ran off."

"All the better!" exclaimed Kurt. "Now you won't need to run humbly after her as you have been doing."

"If Mea desires to meet her in a friendly way again, that is all right," said Mrs. Maxa. "Elvira knows very well who offered the insult and who showed friendship."

Kurt tried to raise another objection, but Lippo and Mazli came running in to announce the important news that Kathy was ready to serve the soup and the dining table was not yet set.

Mrs. Maxa had delayed preparations for dinner for a particular reason. While she talked

with Kurt and Mea she kept looking toward the garden gate to see if Bruno would not enter, but he had not come. Now she began to lay the table, assisted by Mea and Lippo. When Mea tossed a spoon here and a fork there, he followed and put them into their exact positions.

"Lippo must become a hotelkeeper, for his tables will be laid so they look as though set with a compass," observed Kurt, laughing.

"Leave the boy in peace!" said the mother. "It would be a joy to me if all of you did your tasks with the care he does."

Dinner over, the mother anxiously watched the road, for Bruno had not come. Then suddenly Kurt called, "There he comes! And he's carrying a whip!"

Bruno could not help noticing his mother's anxiety in spite of the anger that seethed within him. Immediately he entered, he exclaimed: "I'll tell you at once what has happened, mother! I've only given the pair of them the good whipping they deserve."

"That is bad enough, Bruno. How dreadful!" lamented the mother. "How can you do such things?"

"I will explain, then you can decide, mother,

if I could have done otherwise. On Saturday those boys told me they meant to carry out a plan in which I should have a part. They had discovered the plums in the pastor's garden were ripe; we were to take them. The pastor eats his noon meal in the front room at twelve o'clock, after lessons, and cannot see what goes on in the garden. At that time the tree was to be shaken and our pockets filled with plums. I told them they ought to be ashamed to ask me and that I would find a way to thwart their scheme. They made a big fuss about my being a traitor if I told, declaring it would be a betrayal and just as shameful as shaking the tree. I said I didn't mean to betray them, but would be there with a whip and if they touched the tree I would touch them up in a way to make them remember. They just jeered and said they did not fear my whip. Today when twelve o'clock came and lessons were ended the two ran to the garden. I took out my whip which was hidden in the passageway and ran after them. By that time Edwin was half-way up the tree and Eugene had started climbing. First I only threatened and asked Edwin to come down and tried to keep Eugene from climbing farther.

But they only sneered. When Edwin reached the first branch and shook it so the best plums fell, I let loose, first at the boy higher up and then at the one lower down. Edwin rolled down over Eugene, and the pair ran off groaning, for I kept on striking at them. They left the plums lying there, and I ran off too."

"It's terrible, Bruno, that such things keep happening between you and those two," the mother deplored, "and you are always the one who raves and loses your self-control which can scarcely be excused even if your intentions are good. Oh, if I only knew some way to keep you apart!" she sighed.

That evening Kurt stole up behind his mother's chair and softly asked, "Do we hear the story today?" And when the mother nodded and said, "After the little ones are in bed," Mazli pricked up her ears.

Usually there was a family game after lessons were prepared. Tonight Kurt, generally the first to put up his book, was still scribbling away when Mea carried hers to the closet. Looking over his shoulder she exclaimed, "There he goes, writing verses again! Whom are these about, Kurt?"

"I'll read them aloud, then you can guess," said her brother. "The first stanza was written some time ago and it isn't here. Here is the second:

"She glances haughtily about
As though to say, without a doubt,
'Now surely with my stately mien
I am entitled to be queen.'

Her little friend thinks this quite true,
And humbly ties my lady's shoe,
Who thinks, it seems, with proud demean,
'Tis only due a reigning queen!'

But should the friend by word or act
Imply the queen might use more tact,
She'd break the friendship in a trice
And turn her back on such advice."

Mea could not help smiling a little though a saddening memory rose before her, and she said, "You know, mother, turning her back on me is not the worst of it, but we never agree. She takes the opposite view of everything and we quarrel all the time without my wishing to."

"Just let her go her own way; she is like her brothers," advised Bruno. "I can't be friends with them and wish to have absolutely nothing more to do with them."

"Better still, give them something like you did today," suggested Kurt.

"Of course it must grieve you, Mea, that Elvira is not a better companion," agreed the mother. "You do quite right when you tell her what you think is wrong. Besides, if you let her see your affection and are not over-sensitive to every little difference of opinion, little by little the friendship will grow."

Lippo and Mazli now felt game-time had arrived, but as usual when the fun was at its height the old clock struck the hour saying it was time to cease, to sing the evening hymn and send the little folks to bed. The game was concluded and while the older children gathered up the playthings the mother went to the piano.

Mazli ran after her to plead, "Let me choose the hymn, mother!" and seized the book, but her mother said, "What is the use of the book when you cannot read? Tell me how the hymn starts or some line that you know."

"I'll find it soon," asserted Mazli. "Let me look a minute, mama," and she searched as though for a long-lost treasure. "Here, here!" she called out, holding up the book to her mother, who took it and read:

"Patience is our need,
When sorrow, care and pain—"

"Mazli, tell me why that hymn appeals to you especially," said the mother, but before she could answer, Kurt glanced over his mother's shoulder and laughed, "Sly little Mazli, you selected the longest hymn you could discover. You thought Lippo would see that the very last word was sung before you went to bed!"

"Yes, but you hate to go to bed more than I do," said Mazli a little peevish to have her plan seen through so quickly, "and when you have to go, you wail, 'Oh, what a pity, what a pity!' "

"That's correct, artful Mazli!" admitted Kurt.

"Come, come, children! Let us argue no more," said their mother.

When Mrs. Maxa returned from putting the two younger to bed, the three older children gathered expectantly around the table, for Kurt had informed them the history of the Wallerstaetten family was to be related. They had had the foresight to put the mother's work-basket on the table by her chair, for they knew she would not tell the story without her sewing in hand.

Smiling as she entered, she said, "I see everything is ready for me to begin at once."

"Yes, and from the very beginning where the ghost comes in!" cried Kurt.

His mother looked questioningly at him. "I still have the feeling, Kurt, that you think that you can bring in a ghost in spite of all my denials. I will tell you how talk about a ghost in Wildenstein started. The rumor goes back to a far distant time.

"Up in the castle hangs a picture upon which I often gazed as a child. It made a deep impression upon me. It represents a wandering pilgrim, old and weatherbeaten, with flowing snow-white hair, staff in hand. This pilgrim is supposed to be an ancestor of the Wallerstaettens—a very wild, passionate man. His wife was inconsolable because of the many evil deeds he committed in his early years and spent entire days in the castle chapel praying for him. She died suddenly which so shocked the husband that he left the castle, to seek rest for his disturbed soul as a penitent pilgrim. He placed the emblem of a pilgrim in his coat-of-arms, took the name Wallerstaetten and forsook castle and sons forever.

"In later years two brothers, his descendants, lived in the castle, and were greatly beloved and highly esteemed. But these brothers had in-

herited their ancestor's violent temper. Just what happened between the brothers no one knew, but one morning one was found dead in the great fencing-hall. All the castle-guard was able to report was that the brothers had a quarrel which was settled by swords. The sur-

vivor disappeared, only to be brought back dead a few days later. He had fallen down a mountain precipice to his death. These events caused consternation throughout the neighborhood.

"This gave rise to the first rumor that it must have been the restless ghost of the ancestor that drove the brothers to duel. That was long before my father, your grandfather, came to Nolla as pastor. By that time the story had almost died out, but we children knew that father was very angry with all who broached the subject. My father was a close friend of the master of the castle who was called the Baron. He died before I was five years old and I often heard my father say what a misfortune it was for the two sons to lose their father. I felt so sorry for them that for a long time each night I prayed, 'Dear God, help them in their misfortune.' Both the boys liked me and I often went to the castle, for the Baroness was my godmother. My father taught her two sons and acted as advisor to her. He went up to the castle every morning, my brother Philip on the one side and I on the other. My brother had his lessons with the two boys, as one of them was six months older, the other six

months younger than Philip. Bruno was the elder—"

"I am named after him, am I not, mother?" interrupted Bruno.

"Salo was the younger—"

"And I am named after him!" said Mea quickly. "Isn't it true, mother, that you longed to have a Salo, but as I was a girl you called me Salomea?"

Mrs. Maxa nodded.

"And I am named after father!" exclaimed Kurt, to remind them his name too had honorable origin.

"I went to the castle because my godmother desired it," continued Mrs. Maxa. "She had wished for a daughter and was as kind to me as though I belonged to her. She taught me to embroider and when she walked about the garden and over the estate, taught me all about the trees and flowers. Oh, those were lovely times for me and were to become even more lovely.

"But a deep impression was made on my heart in those days which came to be a menace to my happiness.

"One day on returning from the castle, my

father was so silent that my mother asked if anything had happened up there. I can hear his answer now: "That young Bruno has inherited all the passionate temper of his ancestor, and it is not without reason his mother fears this more than all other evils.' "

"Look over there!" said Kurt bluntly, casting a glance across the table to Bruno and a flash from Bruno's eyes answered him.

"Tell us more quickly, mother!" urged Mea, unwilling to have the story interrupted.

"It seemed terrible to me," continued the mother, "that Bruno, who did nothing but heap kindness on me, should give his mother any worry. But that such was the case I soon saw for myself, for when the three boys were at odds about anything, or anyone displeased Bruno, his frightful temper drove him to deeds of violence.

"His brother Salo was never stirred to anger but he never yielded to his elder brother, for he was just as wilful and stiff-necked, and clung to his rights. He always had my brother Philip on his side, for the two were great friends. Bruno was far more reserved and taciturn than Salo, whose gay laughter and happy songs were

often echoed by the vaulted castle ceilings. The Baroness laughed and sang that way too, and thus Bruno got the notion into his head that his mother loved the younger son most and he could not endure the thought. But this was not the truth, for the Baroness loved her eldest son devotedly as anyone close to her could very easily see.

"When I was ten and Philip fifteen a delightful girl joined our little circle. Our friends in the castle and even my brother, who was not easily enthused, were all enraptured with our new playmate. She was just a year older than I, but how she excelled me in knowledge and ability!

"Her name was Leonore. She was a relative of the Baroness and came from Holstein, where my godmother was born. Leonore had lost her father and a short time later her mother died, so the Baroness decided to adopt the child, for she thought a gentle sister would exert a beneficial influence on the two obstinate brothers. Now a beautiful time for me began.

"Leonore took up her studies under a refined lady who came to the castle soon after her arrival. My godmother arranged that I should

share in all Leonore's lessons. Hence I spent my days at the castle and many of the nights, for in bad weather my kind godmother would not permit me to return home. Leonore had a great and good influence over me, for there was nothing low or mean or despicable in her noble character."

"You certainly had great good fortune, mother," said Mea with emotion.

"And Uncle Phipp, too, with his two friends," added Bruno.

"Ah, children, how often I have earnestly wished you might have such friends," sighed their mother.

"Go on, mother; please go on!" begged Kurt impatiently. "What became of them all?"

"During the leisure hours of our brothers, as we called the boys," continued Mrs. Maxa, "they were our dear playmates. We heartily rejoiced when by any chance one of their numerous study hours was omitted and they asked us to join their games. The Baroness had foreseen correctly: Since Leonore came among us the feuds between the brothers were less frequent, and in her presence Bruno suppressed his outbreaks of anger. He had probably noticed how

very pale she had been at one such scene. Thus we passed four years in cloudless sunshine. Then the young Barons entered a German university and Philip went to an agricultural school. From then on we saw the brothers only in the summer when they came home for the short holidays; then there was nothing but joy from early dawn to late night. Every day began with music and ended with it, for both the Wallerstaettens were intensely musical and possessed excellent voices, while Leonore's singing stirred all hearts.

"I had passed my seventeenth and Leonore her eighteenth birthday when a summer came that was to bring many changes. My brother Philip was not expected home; since the summer before he had been manager of an estate in the north, a position the Baroness had secured for him. The young Wallerstaettens had finished their studies and their mother knew she must now discuss plans for their future. She thought perhaps they would both like to travel, but hoped one of them would desire to stay at home, to lift the care of the castle estate from her shoulders. They must have expressed themselves soon after their arrival in a way to dis-

turb her, for she went about silently, avoiding all our questions. Bruno paced the castle terrace by the hour, speaking never a word, his eyes aflame. With Salo alone could we have any intercourse, but when we plied him with questions, even he was dumb. But this painful situation did not last long. The fifth or sixth day after their arrival the sons did not appear at breakfast and the Baroness made agitated inquiry if they had left the castle, if anyone had seen them, whither they had gone. No one knew anything about them. Apollonie alone had seen them early that morning as they were climbing the staircase. She was sent up to the tower rooms, but they were empty. On her own impulse Apollonie then opened the door to the fencing-hall, and found Salo half unconscious on the floor. He declared there was nothing to worry about—that he had lost consciousness for just a moment. She helped him downstairs for he was bleeding from a wound in the head. The Baroness spoke not a word, but accompanied her son to his room and remained with him until the physician had come and gone. When she came back to us she was quite composed, but paler than I had ever seen her. She

explained that when she had asked her sons concerning their plans for the future, each had declared it had been his private determination for many years when his studies ended to remain with his mother and Leonore at Wildenstein. The discovery that Salo had no intention of yielding threw Bruno in a rage. He challenged his brother, giving him the choice of weapons, to decide who should stay at home, for there was not room for both. Salo was wounded and had lost consciousness. Bruno, fearing something worse, had disappeared. The doctor had not found Salo's wound dangerous, but every precaution had to be taken as he was far from rugged.

"Soon after the sad incident the Baroness prepared for a journey, wishing to take Salo and Leonore to the south for the winter. Salo had not recovered quickly as they had hoped, and instead of gaining strength in our vigorous mountain climate, Leonore grew more delicate and slender. The mother received a brief message from Bruno saying not to worry: he was traveling in Spain and knew his brother lived. Now all those I had loved so dearly had journeyed off and for the first time I saw the

castle forsaken and its lighted windows looked down on us no more, for they were closed and remain so to this day."

"Oh, did they never come back?" asked Kurt with regret.

"Never!" answered Mrs. Maxa. "It was at this time, too, that the rumor about the ghost of Wildenstein was revived. This one was said to have heard it, that one to have seen it, and to this day the thing haunts the heads of many people."

"Kurt's, for instance," remarked Bruno dryly.

"Finish the story, mother!" pleaded that boy quickly. "What became of them all, particularly the banished brother?"

"The rest of the story is short and sad. Leonore wrote faithfully. After the first winter in the south the health of the Baroness was shattered. She did not wish to return to the castle and sent her orders to Apollonie, who had married the castle gardener, the two now being caretakers of the estate.

"Three years later the Baroness died and just a little before that Leonore had become Salo's wife. Their life together was short, for Salo

died of fever three years later and within a few months Leonore followed him. They left a young son and daughter, who went to live with their mother's aunt in Holstein. This much I learned from Apollonie and all I know of Bruno is through the same source. Your father, Pastor Bergmann, and I had married about the time the Baroness died, and we went to the parsonage at Sils, where Philip had just bought an estate. One day Apollonie came to me in great excitement, for after eight years' absence and silence Baron Bruno had suddenly returned to the castle with a companion, Mr. Demetrius. The Baron had expected to find his mother, brother and former playmates, and when Apollonie told him all that had happened, his anger broke forth, for he believed news had been kept from him purposely. Ignoring the letters Apollonie showed him from the Baroness, all of which looked forward to his return and stated she had written him frequently (though these failed to reach him on account of his unsettled life) Bruno again forsook the castle in anger and bitterness and nothing more is known of him. Mr. Demetrius, or Trius as we call him, returned to the empty castle alone a few years

ago. Meanwhile Apollonie had lost her husband, closed up the castle and gone to live in the gardener's cottage which she now occupies. Mr. Trius lives a secluded life, seeing no one but Apollonie, and her only when there is need. However much Apollonie has striven to secure information of his master, he gives none. Now you know how my youth was connected with the castle, you can understand why I moved back here within a year after your father died. Another reason was that the rector here offered to teach Bruno for several years, which was much better than a country school. So you see why the forsaken castle attracts me; the spot is rich in memories of the happy days of my childhood and youth."

The children clamored to hear more, but to no avail, and soon all was silence throughout the house. Only the mother was astir and she softly stepped from one child's bed to another. There lay her eldest, the lad who could get so terribly angry, his forehead now smooth and peaceful. He was such an honorable lad,—but what if the unfortunate trait gained ascendency? Soon he must leave her side and who would then give him affectionate understanding?

But Mrs. Maxa knew the Hand that guides, protects and saves where no mother hand has power, and with folded hands and bowed head she went from bed to bed surrendering her children to their Father in Heaven.

CHAPTER IV

AN UNEXPECTED APPARITION

ON arriving at school next day, Kurt saw Loneli just across the street, her head down when usually she skipped merrily on her way.

"What's the matter, Loneli?" he asked as he drew near. "Who has hurt you?"

"No one, but I cannot be happy any more," and tears again filled her eyes. "If you only knew grandmother since I sat on the disgrace-bench! I wouldn't mind if she was only cross, for that lasts only a few days. But she is so sad, and the worst time is when I leave for school in the morning. She says I have brought shame on her that will turn her hair white. All her life honor has been first with her; now I have brought lifelong shame on her and myself too," and she burst into tears.

"No, no! There is no need to cry like that! Things are not the way your grandmother takes them," said Kurt consolingly. "I'll go and explain, so be happy and everything will come out right."

"Oh, do you think so?" asked Loneli and her eyes glistened; Kurt always stood by what he said. Now he darted off into the noisy crowd of children, for he had important things to present to them. It was a good thing he had so many friends for he often needed them all to carry out his plans. Now he had two undertakings in mind, in which it was necessary to enroll his comrades. Kurt explained his intentions with eager words and expressive gestures so that the first strokes of the tower clock were unnoticed. However, at the eighth tap the children suddenly dispersed like a flock of frightened birds.

Kurt was first to arrive home that day and stepped before his mother, holding out a large sheet of paper.

"Look, mother; now Mr. Trius gets his song! Last evening he threatened some more of my friends, but they were able to save themselves from his stick. He must have four eyes and four ears that see and hear everything! I've finished the song and I'll read it to you."

"I wish you did not have any friends that Mr. Trius had to threaten," returned his mother. "I only hope he never will you."

"He often threatens the innocent," asserted Kurt. "Now listen to a truthful description of him:

A SONG ABOUT THE MAN WITH THE STICK

Old Trius is the castle-guard
And loves to beat the boys.
To wield his heavy wooden stick
Is one of his chief joys.

Old Trius wears a yellow coat,
And always prowls around;
And when the children spy his stick,
They're off with leap and bound.

Old Trius with the peaked cap
Pokes round just like a bear,
And when he does not beat some boy,
Be sure there's no boy there.

Old Trius reaches out to strike
Whomever he can find,
And those who dodge the blow in front
Receive it from behind.

With every blow Old Trius deals
He twists his face awry;
And many times we'll feel his stick
Before he's called to die."

Mrs. Maxa could not restrain a smile though she said earnestly, "On no account must that song fall into the hands of Mr. Trius! He might

not take it as a joke and you must not offend him. I would advise you, Kurt, not to arouse him; he might answer in a manner you little expect."

Kurt asked permission to be out with his friends that evening, and when his mother consented, she added, "Of course, Kurt, you are not planning to go on one of those notorious apple expeditions."

Kurt assured her a little indignantly he would do nothing of that kind, and made way for Lippo who was using every effort to shove Kurt aside and get to his mother.

"Mr. Pastor sends his regards and wishes a reply to this letter," he reported.

"For whom did you bring the letter?"

"I didn't bring it. Lize of the parsonage brought it. She saw me in front of the house and asked me to carry the letter up to you and ask whether or not you wished to send an answer!"

"There, that is an exact report!" said his mother, smiling. "Mazli, if you would learn from Lippo I would have less trouble in distinguishing between what really happens and what you imagine."

As she spoke she opened the letter and was greatly shocked at its contents. "Tell the girl I will go to Mr. Pastor; she need not wait," she said to Lippo.

What she had feared had become a certainty, for the pastor wrote he had decided to discontinue teaching the boys; the time had arrived for them to be put into other hands.

Mrs. Maxa sat silent, deep in thought, her hands idle in her lap, a most unusual thing.

Mea came hurrying up to claim her mother's sympathy. "Just think, mother," she exclaimed with a passionate gesture, "Elvira declares she wishes to have nothing more to do with me, nothing! She's in a rage because I thought it wrong for her not to confess that she had whispered in school. She said if I could rebuke her for the sake of tattered Loneli, I could go to her for friendship too."

"Let it rest that way for a while," counselled her mother. "You have always run after her. Now let her have her way. She should not call Loneli tattered. There are few people as honest and thrifty as Apollonie and her granddaughter."

Mea would have liked to make further com-

plaint, for it was her way to bring every trouble to her mother, but she realized this must wait till evening as Bruno had just come in to ask anxiously, "What did Mr. Pastor write, mother? Has he discovered the plum theft?"

"Perhaps that did not bring about his decision but it may have hastened it. Read this letter," and she handed it over to him.

"That is really not so bad," said he. "When you send me to the city I will get away from that pair. You know they revel in underhanded tricks."

"But they are going to the city and you will be together, with no one to care for or listen to you."

"Don't worry about that! The city is large and we will not be together as much as here. Rest assured I will keep far enough away from them."

At lunch Kurt swallowed his apple-dumpling without noticing he was eating his favorite dish, then he dashed back to school to sit through the session it seemed would never end. Then a long procession was formed which marched tumultuously toward Apollonie's cottage. Here a halt was made and Kurt climbed upon the

woodpile while the others gathered around. Apollonie opened a window to learn what it was all about, and Loneli stood behind her, having run all the way from school for she had heard that a procession was to march to her grandmother's cottage.

"Mrs. Apollonie," Kurt called out in a loud voice, "two whole classes have come to tell you that Loneli was not at fault when sent to the disgrace-bench. Out of politeness she answered a question and when the teacher asked who had whispered, frankly said she had. But she did not say she had only made an answer as that would have been informing against another. We all wanted to tell you so you will not think Loneli disgraced, but that you shall know she is one of the kindest and most obliging children in the school."

"Hurrah for Loneli!" suddenly shouted Lux, the sexton's son, and the whole group cheered, "Hurrah for Loneli!" until the mountain resounded the echo, "Loneli!"

Apollonie threw wide the window, put out her head and called, "It's fine of you children to justify Loneli, and I thank you. Now wait a moment!" and she vanished from the window to

THE WHOLE GROUP CHEERED, "HURRAH FOR LONELI!" UNTIL THE MOUNTAIN RESOUNDED THE ECHO.

step out of the door with a great basket of luscious apples on her arm. Holding it out invitingly, she said, "Help yourselves!"

"Good gracious!" Lux cried, biting into a juicy one, "I know these apples! They grow in the castle garden right in the corner by the fence." Then confidentially, "Kurt, I wonder how she could get such a basket of them without —you know," and he went through the methods of chastising used by Mr. Trius.

"What are you thinking of?" exclaimed Kurt angrily. "Mrs. Apollonie does not have to steal apples. Mr. Trius can well afford to give her a few baskets of them for all the shirts she sews and mends for him."

"Oh, that's different!" said Lux, now better informed.

The big basket was quickly emptied, and with loud thanks the group scattered to their homes. Kurt knew this was the time to prepare his lessons, for another expedition was planned for the evening. Noticing Mrs. Knippel behind him, he ran up to his house, threw open the living-room door and called, "Get Mazli out of the way or something is bound to happen! Quick!" Then he bounded away again.

Bruno and Mea, busy at their work, thought their brother could attend to the matter himself if he thought it so urgent and kept their seats, but Mazli jumped up to see what was going to happen. "Why will something frightful happen when Mrs. Knippel comes?" she asked loudly as that lady entered.

Mea hastily drew Mazli out of the room and in order to explain her hurried retreat said she would fetch her mother, and Bruno tarried only until his mother's appearance permitted flight.

"Really your children are very peculiar, Mrs. Maxa!" began Mrs. Knippel. "I think so every time I see them. What is the use of all your admonitions? One cannot improve upon nature. Not one of my children is so outspoken, not to use a stronger expression, as your little daughter was just now."

"I regret you have to tell me that," answered Mrs. Maxa. "Is it possible my child has given offense? I hope you have never had that experience with my older children."

"No, I will not say I have, but all of them have inherited the love of preaching, especially Mea. Children may hold different opinions without sermonizing one another."

"My children often hold opposite views, but I cannot say they preach much," said Mrs. Maxa.

"Mea does, and on that account is always at strife with her girl friends." Then less severely, "You have received a letter from our pastor saying he is discontinuing his teaching?" And when Mrs. Maxa nodded she continued, "So the change is really here! My husband thinks prompt action should be taken. He is going to the city this morning, indeed he has left already and will look up a boarding-place for the three boys in the fall."

"You do not mean to tell me your husband will engage quarters for Bruno also?" said Mrs. Maxa in consternation.

"Why, yes; my husband sent me to say he is glad to do it for you," she calmly replied.

"But, Mrs. Knippel, I am not ready for this yet! I haven't talked it over with my brother; he is my children's guardian, you know."

"Rest easy about that," said Mrs. Knippel with a superior smile. "My husband has a sister living near Mr. Falk. He is stopping to visit her on the way and will talk it over with him."

This news calmed Mrs. Maxa a little, for her

brother knew how matters stood between the schoolmates and how little she desired the three to live together. But she could not help questioning why the Knippels should try to force their plan, and she said, "Really, I do not understand why the three boys should go away together. They are not such friends that they wish it, and you, Mrs. Knippel, have not been so favorably impressed with my children's manners that you should wish your sons to live with one of mine."

"Anything else would not be proper," replied the caller. "That is the way my husband sees it. What would the townspeople say if the sons of the two leading families here did not live together while in school? They would think something had surely happened between the families."

"I scarcely think anything the three boys do will cause any stir in the town," said Mrs. Maxa with a smile.

At this moment the door was thrown wide and with a triumphant look as though to say, "See whom I have brought!" Mazli stood on the threshold holding Apollonie by the hand. The woman drew back and said, "No, no, Mazli!

You should have told me that your mother had a visitor!"

Mrs. Knippel rose haughtily. "It seems some visitors are greeted by your children with particular joy! They have strange taste," and she walked toward the door.

"Apollonie is an old friend here, and the children love her. Perhaps they inherit the attachment," replied Mrs. Maxa.

"I would like to make one more remark," said Mrs. Knippel, "and that is that the performance of your young Kurt and his motley crowd in front of Apollonie's cottage can be called nothing other than a riot."

His mother asked what he had done but Mrs. Knippel proceeded on her way, declaring the occurrence was not worth talking about.

Directly the field was clear, Mazli pulled Apollonie into the room and the woman hurried to apologize for having intruded. She had told Mazli she wished to see her mother and the little girl had taken her in without further ado. She had come to tell Mrs. Maxa something she would find hard to believe.

Noticing Mazli was listening with both her little ears, Mrs. Maxa interrupted Apollonie

long enough to say, "Mazli, go and play with Lippo until I come."

"Tell me about it afterward, Apollonie!" begged Mazli as she went off.

Apollonie's story was a long one, so it was later than usual when the family sat down to supper.

Kurt ate hastily and rushed off as soon as possible, promising his mother he would not be away late. Now the first thing to do was to meet his good friends who had pledged themselves to join the expedition. As Kurt approached the rendezvous, he was a little disappointed, for though it was twilight he could see very few had gathered. This was not the crowd he had rallied at midday for the adventure.

"They are afraid! They are scared!" they greeted Kurt, and one vied with another to tell him there had been many more boys and girls too, but as darkness deepened, one after the other vanished until among the few that were left there were only four girls.

"That doesn't matter; there are enough," declared Kurt. "Now let us get along, for it is a long way. We will go to the little woods back

of the castle. We'll sing our challenge there first, then pause to give the ghost plenty of time; then sing again and pause once more. Then we'll sing it a third and last time. By that time the ghost will have appeared, if there is one, for you can understand he would not allow us to make a fool of him. If he does not appear, then we will tell everyone what we have done and they will see it is all a superstition; that there is no ghost of Wildenstein wandering around. Now, forward!"

The love of adventure urging them on, the party started off. It was dark at first, but then the moon flooded the fields with its light. They clambered up the hill back of the castle and entered the dark pine woods, for the trees were close together. As the moon sailed behind the clouds again, the noisy group grew quiet. Here and there one stole off and did not reappear. Three of the girls whispered together and then mysteriously vanished. Those in front did not look back but ran after their leaders, for there was a peculiar crackling in the bushes behind them. Kurt, Lux and his adventuresome sister Clevi were at the very front, and as things grew quieter Kurt looked back. "Where are you all?

Come along!" he called with an authoritative tone.

"We are coming," answered three.

Two more children came close behind them, but no more.

"Where is all the crowd?" Kurt asked, halting. "Let us wait until they catch up. We must all be together when we reach the top."

But no more came, and only an owl gave a little hoot in answer to Kurt's calls.

"You cowards!" called out Clevi lustily. "To be afraid of the trees! That's certainly funny!"

"We're not scared anyway, or we wouldn't be here," said one.

"Come along forward!" ordered Kurt. "If there are only eight of us, we'll have to sing just so much the louder."

Now the advance was rapid. The woods were less dense; they must be near its edge. Correct! for now the old gray towers appeared through the trees. They were close to the castle.

"We halt here," said Kurt. "Do not step out of the woods. The ghost of Wildenstein can come to us when he takes his walk on the terrace. Now sing!" and all joined in with energy:

"Come out, you Ghost of Wildenstein.
You think us scared. You're wrong!
We come this night in full moonshine
To sing to you a song.
Come out! Come out! For it is true
We have no fear of you."

The night wind soughed in the old pines. The open terrace before the castle lay quiet and forsaken in the moonlight.

"He did not hear us; we must sing again," said Kurt. "When he does not answer this time, we'll tell him what we know. Then we'll shout the chorus:

'Hurrah! Hurrah! We all decline
Belief in the Ghost of Wildenstein!' "

Clevi's strong, clear voice pealed out:

"Come out, you Ghost of Wildenstein!"

and the boys joined in with a thunder of,

"You think us scared! You're wrong!"

Kurt stared at the terrace and asked, "What's that? What can it be?"

With slow step a tall form advanced along the terrace. It was so tall it could not be a man; yet it was no tree, for it actually came toward the woods. Did he see aright—or was it the moonlight that was just throwing a shadow? At

WITH MEASURED STEPS IT CAME SILENTLY TOWARD THE OLD PINES.

this moment the biggest boy turned and darted off, and four others followed in full flight. Only Lux and Clevi stood their ground with Kurt.

The frightful form came nearer and nearer. Now the bright moonlight fell upon the wanderer. He was in armor, that was easily seen. His cuirass gleamed in the moonlight, as did his tall helmet with its nodding plumes. A long mantle fell from his shoulders down to his high riding-boots, enfolding half the monstrous figure. Could this be a man? Impossible! With measured steps it came silently toward the old pines where stood the speechless, horror-stricken trio of singers.

Suddenly Lux darted wildly down the slope. Clevi gazed once more with wide eyes at the approaching form; she simply *had* to see exactly what it was like. Then she dashed after her brother. That left Kurt alone and the frightful thing was actually coming up to him! With desperation Kurt sprang to one side, out of the wood, on toward the meadow, raced down the mountain, bounded over one hedge, then over another, and dashed along until he stood in the garden of his beloved home, where the light streaming through the windows gave him peace-

ful greeting. He took a deep breath and ran indoors.

"Ah, is it you?" his mother asked. "A little late, are you not? Was the moonlight so lovely you found it hard to come in? Or was the night chase such fun? But you are quite out of breath, Kurt! Sit down a moment, then you must go to bed; the other children went long since."

Ordinarily Kurt loved nothing better than to sit alone with his mother and have her give her whole attention to him. Now he shunned it. His mother might ask more about his chase; what would he say? So he declared he would rather go to bed immediately.

Once there, he pondered a long time. Surely there was no such thing as a ghost in Wildenstein; his mother had emphatically said so. Who was it, then, that he had seen in cuirass and helmet and long riding-mantle? Certainly not Mr. Trius, for that short stout man and the tree-high wanderer could not be the same person. Perhaps from years back the castle owners had ordered a night-watch to go around in armor. If only he had not run away! He could have let the watchman approach him and then explained

his purpose. Wiping out the ancient superstition would only have pleased the night-watch. If only he had not run away!

Now that Kurt was safe in bed and Bruno's heavy breathing assured him of his presence, it was easy enough to be brave. Would he had been so at the castle! How could a real man be so frightfully tall, he pondered. In his heart Kurt felt it was impossible. "If I could only talk the matter over with mother!" he sighed. But he would feel such shame for she had distinctly asked him to forget the matter. Even if he had only wished to succeed in rooting out the superstition, he had acted against her instructions—and what had he gained? By morning the town would buzz with the story that the ghost of Wildenstein was walking again, and he did not know how he could deny it. If only that horrid tallness had not shown itself!

Later, when Mrs. Maxa went from one bed to another, as usual, she tarried longer beside Kurt for he groaned in his sleep.

"Kurt," she asked softly, "are you in pain, dear?"

Waking, he said, "Oh, is it you, mother?" and grasped her hand. "I thought the ghost of

Wildenstein stretched out his fearful long arm after me."

"You have been dreaming," said his mother gently. "Did you say your evening prayers after all the day's excitement?"

"No, so many things were in my mind, I forgot it," Kurt confessed.

"Do so now; then you will sleep peacefully," she advised, "but do not forget that the dear Lord listens to our prayers, consoles and soothes us only when we fully open our hearts to him," and with a good-night kiss, his mother left him.

CHAPTER V

STORMY DAYS

For several days Mrs. Maxa's household lacked its usual merriment. Even she went about silent and subdued, Bruno's future heavy on her heart. She had written her brother to come to advise her but he had replied that most urgent business was taking him on a journey.

Bruno was so wrought up over the possibility of living with the Knippel boys that he secretly made the most daring plans to avoid such an unbearable situation. Why not suddenly disappear, like the young Baron von Wallerstaetten, and travel in Spain? Lacking money, he could ship as a sailor for China or Australia and write books of travel. Or why not join a band of minstrels? His mother often said he had a fine voice. Bruno would puzzle an entire evening over which plan might be best.

Mea's brow clouded with trouble, for what a time she was having! When the family moved to Nolla, Elvira took pains to become her friend.

Mrs. Knippel had showered her with invitations in order to strengthen the tie, and had done the same with Bruno for the sake of her sons. To be sure, Bruno had declared from the start he would not be their friend, but as they took their lessons together, there was continual contention. However, Mea was overjoyed at the advances and gave herself heartily to Elvira. The wide difference in their natures was soon apparent, but Mea thought they would understand each other as time went on. Nevertheless all her attempts at better mutual understanding only brought about wider division between the two girls.

Since the school incident, Elvira had not spoken and day after day Mea sat on the bench beside the sulking girl until the situation became unbearable. Mea groaned at the outlook, though she was pleased that Kurt was so depressed he took no note of it; otherwise he would have inflicted more of his trying songs on her.

In fact, Kurt was bearing a heavy load. He was keeping something from his mother. Why not acknowledge it all? But his mother would never believe he had seen a figure which could not be human. Yet he had! And now he was

to blame that most people in Nolla still believed in the ghost of Wildenstein. He could not look his mother in the face.

Lippo and Mazli alone pursued their usual happy ways. When the household depression was too much for Mazli, she knew a place of refuge, and would say, "I really must pay Apollonie a visit, mother." Mrs. Maxa frequently let her go, and alone, for she knew the path and Loneli always brought her home in the evening, never without a nosegay as Apollonie's gift.

Since Kurt had restored her good name at school, Loneli was always wondering if she might be able to save him some time from some distress. She had noticed for quite a while he had not been the merry leader in all the gay sports. What could have upset him? She had exceptional talent for nosing things out and recalled the fact that it had never been told how that night expedition to the castle had turned out. The boys only threw out dark hints that the ghost was more visible than ever up there, but none ever acknowledged he had run away. Even the bold Clevi, who boasted about her adventures, was still as a mouse and when Loneli

demanded information about the affair, let her whistle for an answer.

Now Loneli pieced all her observations together and next day after school she pounced down on the astonished Clevi, shouting, "I know what you did! You didn't want to follow Kurt, even though he was the leader! And you ran away because you were scared, and spoiled it all for him."

"Yes, but Kurt got scared too," Clevi said angrily, for the reproach struck home. "I saw how he dashed down the mountain!"

"Was he really afraid, do you think? But what of?" probed Loneli.

"What of?" Clevi repeated. "You should have seen the frightful giant form that came toward us from the castle!" And now it was out that they had been frightened, Clevi chattered on about the fearfully tall, armored knight with the high boots. long mantle—

"Was the mantle blue?" suddenly asked Loneli.

"One can't see colors clearly at night," said Clevi. "But the color isn't important; it was the height, the height that was so frightful! He wore a tall helmet with a still higher lot of black

plumes on it that beckoned horribly to us!"

Joy leaped to Loneli's eyes and she shot off like an arrow toward Mrs. Maxa's house. Kurt stood at the garden hedge, his schoolbag still on his back, tearing one leaf after another from the hawthorns and tossing them away as though he were casting aside unpleasant thoughts.

"Wait, Kurt!" she called from afar. "Don't go in; I have something to tell you!"

When she reached him, Loneli was suddenly embarrassed; she felt sure it would sound as though she were questioning him and she hesitated, not knowing how to begin.

"What do you wish of me, Loneli?" asked Kurt encouragingly as he saw her embarrassment.

"I wished to ask if—if—oh, are you unhappy because of what happened with the ghost, and yet you know there is none?"

"I don't wish to hear any more about it—absolutely nothing!" he declared with emphasis as he tore a handful of leaves from the hedge and cast them savagely to the ground.

"But suppose after all it was just a man?" she added.

"That's easily said when you have never seen him! Why talk about it, Loneli?" and he turned to go into the house, but Loneli would not desist.

"Just wait a moment, Kurt!" she begged. "It's true I have not seen him, but Clevi told me how he looked. I know what he did to make himself so tall. I also know where he got the armor, the blue mantle and the helmet with those big black plumes."

"What?" exclaimed Kurt, staring at Loneli as though she were the mysterious spirit itself. "How can you know anything about it?"

"But I do! Listen! Grandmother has told me many of her experiences at the castle. There is a great hall in the lowest part of the castle, and on its walls hang many weapons and such things as cuirasses and helmets. In one corner is a knight in full armor, a helmet with black plumes on its head. When the young masters of the castle wanted to have great fun they lifted this armored knight to their shoulders and threw the long blue mantle over it which would cover the bearer down to his boot-tops. The figure looked so frightful that when it crossed the terrace the two young ladies would

always scream out, which amused the young masters immensely."

"Oh, then my mother must have seen it and knows quite well how it looks!" burst out Kurt suddenly.

"Yes, of course; she was one of the two young ladies."

"But there's nobody in the castle except Mr. Trius, and he couldn't have been there," Kurt objected. "I know he slinks around in the meadow every evening until late, spying after boys who may come after apples, and the orchard is so far from the little woods he could not have heard us."

"It was Mr. Trius, you may be sure of that," asserted Loneli. "Grandmother often says Mr. Trius knows everything that is going on. For a number of days the boys knew what you wanted to do, and they do not talk softly. They try to get those apples every evening and you can very well suppose Mr. Trius heard what you had in mind."

"Yes, that is true. I must go to mother at once!" exclaimed Kurt, but tarried long enough to say, "A thousand thanks, Loneli! You do not know what a great favor you have done me."

"Where is mother? Where is mother?" he roared, almost running down Lippo in the hall.

"You know well enough where mama is at dinner time. You are late from school," said Lippo, going on carefully with his pitcher of water.

"Yes, I am, little watchman," laughed Kurt, hastening to the dining-room door where he paused to say, "Oh, are you ready to eat?" for he was astonished to find the family taking their places at the table. "What a pity! I wanted to tell you something, mother!"

She looked up questioningly. It was a long time since he had brought her any news, and a long time since his voice had been so clear and his eyes so bright.

"After dinner, Kurt," she said kindly. "What makes you so late today?"

"In the first place I dawdled a little," he confessed, "and then Loneli had something to tell me. I have often said she is the most clever child in all Nolla and even if she has been trained by simple Apollonie, she is more refined than one I know who decks herself out with fine ribbons and gay flowers. I would prefer one Loneli to a thousand Elviras!"

Lippo had been gazing at Kurt's plate and now said, "Here come the beans, and you haven't touched your soup!"

"Yes, Kurt, eat your soup. We all agree Loneli is an unusually dear child," said his mother.

"Must you do all this talking today," asked the observing Mazli, "because you talked so little yesterday and the day before that?"

"That's the reason, little discoverer!" laughed Kurt, and quickly ate his soup.

Only after school could Kurt get his mother to himself. Then he made honest and full confession of his disobedience without seeking to justify his act.

"But, mother, you are not angry with me, are you?" he pleaded earnestly. "I will never do such a thing again if I know you do not wish it, for I've learned how miserable it makes me to disobey."

Because he had acknowledged his error, Mrs. Maxa uttered no further rebuke, but confirmed all Loneli had told him about the armored knight, and said she was convinced the ever-watchful Mr. Trius had discovered his plan and had probably meant to scare the boys away once

and for all with the frightful apparition. "Can I rely on you, Kurt," she concluded, "never to have anything more to do with this fiction of the ghost of Wildenstein?"

Kurt promised; he had had enough of his attempt to disprove the ghost. So far as he was concerned everything was explained, and now that he could converse with his mother with ease, he returned to his brothers and sisters with a song of joy.

Mrs. Maxa was intensely pleased that Kurt was himself again, but when she went back to the living-room it was not Kurt's song, but an outcry of "Uncle Phipp! Uncle Phipp!" that she heard. Sure enough, the two younger had met him on their way home from Apollonie's, and now the three older children shouted their greeting. His coming was always a most joyous occasion.

"How glad I am you have come at last!" said Mrs. Maxa. "Welcome, Phipp, welcome! Do come in!"

"As soon as I can," he replied, for with a child hanging to each hand and three others pressing around him in a stormy welcome, progress was slow. At last, assisted by ten helpful hands, he

was seated in the armchair, completely exhausted.

"You rogues! Lippo, do you want to strangle your godfather with those two fat arms?" he asked of the little fellow who had climbed the back of his chair. "If you slip, I'll be throttled. Then you will not find out for whom I intend the harmonica that is in my coat-pocket."

Now Lippo thought a harmonica the grandest thing. His seatmate at school owned one and could play whole tunes on it; it was a wonder! Lippo let go his grip quickly, and Uncle Phipp dove into his deep pockets. Yes, there it was! How much larger, how much more beautiful than Toneli's little one! Lippo held the treasure in his hands and could hardly believe Uncle Phipp when he said, "There, take it; it was intended for you!"

New splendors for the others emerged from the deep pockets, but Lippo saw and heard nothing more, for he was engrossed in producing earsplitting notes on the harmonica until supper was announced and Uncle Phipp was escorted to the table much like a prisoner of war.

"Now first of all, Phipp," said his sister when she returned from seeing her brood to bed, "what are we going to do about Bruno? You told Mr. Knippel decisively not to engage a boarding-place for him?"

"On the contrary, I gave him full authority to do so," replied her brother. "Mr. Knippel gave me the impression you had agreed to the plan and were well pleased he should manage it. This thing of the three boys living together isn't likely

to be so bad. Don't always imagine the worst is going to happen."

"How could you do that, Phipp?" she lamented. "The low nature of those two boys rouses Bruno's anger, and his inability to control his fury is my chief worry. What will happen when the three are constantly together?"

"But, Maxa, I could not do otherwise. Mr. Knippel was determined to have it this way, and you know how easily he is insulted. The matter will soon settle itself. The three will have some sort of a row and then I will step in, for that will be sufficient reason to separate them.

"Now I have something to say which will make you more cheerful," Philip continued, glad to change the subject. "The two ladies from Hanover who were my fellow-travelers came to seek my advice. They had received urgent summons to return home as their mother was dangerously ill and begged to see them. However, the little girl in their care has been ill, and yesterday the physician declared she could not make the journey without danger; he was certain the slow fever would run for several weeks. The ladies put their problem before the doctor,

saying both had to go, though one might return in a week or two; could they find a trustworthy and competent nurse for the child? The doctor suggested the new hospital at Sils, and said he would visit the child daily. Fearing the doctor might be prejudiced, the ladies sought my advice. I told them the hospital was good but small, and suggested the decision be left to the child's parents. They replied that Leonore von Wallerstaetten was an orphan, and the aunt who had given them charge over her was also dead."

"Philip, there is no longer any doubt that she is our Leonore's daughter!" declared Mrs. Maxa in great emotion. "Oh, Philip, how could you suggest the hospital? Why didn't you say your sister would take her into her own home and care for her?"

"How could I do that?" asked the brother. "How could I bring a fever patient here? All five children might come down with the disease. What would you have said then?"

"I will go to Sils with you early tomorrow, Phipp, and you must take me to the ladies. I will tell them that as the dear friend of her mother, I have the right to nurse Leonore. The

little invalid can certainly make the journey here in your closed carriage. You can inform the doctor of the plan and send the carriage. You will do that for me, Phipp? Our Leonore's child must not go to the village hospital! I could not bear the thought of that thing happening to her!"

"This is not a sudden impulse you will regret?"

"I am quite determined, Phipp," his sister assured him, "and you must help me carry the matter through. I can manage things here, but you must help gain the consent of the ladies; they do not know me."

"I spoke about you to the two Misses Remke when they mentioned the name von Wallerstaetten. I told them you were the friend of the child's mother and would certainly visit her now and then in the hospital. That seemed to please them," and then he launched into detailed plans for the following day.

Mrs. Maxa listened calmly to them all, then said, "I also have some news. Just think, Baron Bruno has returned! He came in the middle of the night and not a soul has seen him. How must he feel, absolutely alone in those

lonely rooms where he spent such happy times with those he loved but whom he forsook in passion and fear!"

"Yes, and why? He wished it!" impatiently. "But you cannot speak of him without your voice assuming a tone as though you were speaking of a martyr! Why is the raging lion back again?"

"Don't be so hard on him, Phipp!" pleaded his sister. "He is alone and forsaken! Does a burden grow lighter because we bring it on ourselves? It is sad he is ill, and perhaps he returned on that account. I learned that from Apollonie who is always in touch with Mr. Trius. She is scheming all sorts of ways how to care for her young master, as she still insists on calling him, and how to put his rooms in order as his mother would wish. I can see how she chafes at the thought of Mr. Trius being sole nurse, servant, cook and chambermaid, for she longs to do something to make his life a little like it was in the old days."

"For the love of heaven, I hope you do not intend to try to do anything! He knows how to have things different. Keep your hands off or you will be sorry."

"Rest easy; there is nothing that can be done," replied Mrs. Maxa. "If I knew any way to help him, I certainly would do so and let a little sunshine into those darkened rooms. I had hoped to accomplish something through Apollonie until she explained how matters stand. Feeling she was still a castle servant, she wanted to take things in hand when Mr. Trius told her his master had arrived, but he forbade her even the garden, heretofore open to her, saying he had strict orders, his master knew nobody here and did not wish to know anyone. So I can accomplish nothing, however great my desire to help that lonely man."

"All the better!" said her brother. "I am glad the rabid fellow has barred you out, for you would have frustrated any of my plans to keep you away, I know that."

"Quite true!" she assented with a smile. "But if we are to begin our journey early in the morning, it is time we go to bed."

In spite of the suggestion to retire being her own, Mrs. Maxa busied herself until midnight putting a bedroom on the top floor in order. When everything necessary had been done, she carried a bowl of lovely roses to the little

chamber and put it on the table there, for, said Mrs. Maxa to herself, the child of her beloved Leonore must receive a happy impression the moment she entered the room that was to be hers in the strange house; she must think it both pretty and homelike. Giving the room a last glance to assure herself all was just as she wished it, she closed the door and went quietly to her own room.

CHAPTER VI

NEW FRIENDS

A TWO hours' walk brought them to Sils next morning and they found the Remke ladies kneeling before their empty trunks, with heaps of clothes, shoes, books, bandboxes and a hundred and one trifles on all sides.

Seeing the confusion, Mrs. Maxa apologized and wished to withdraw, but the ladies jumped up quickly to shower their kind friend, Mr. Falk, with thanks for his help in their difficulty and to meet his sister. Mr. Falk set chairs for them all, stepping carefully across the littered floor, and then Mrs. Maxa quickly convinced the ladies the little girl entrusted to their care would come into good hands if they put her under her protection.

"It was hard to decide to leave her behind," said one, "but we are compelled to go, and she could not stand the journey just now. It is lovely that your wishes and our needs are the same. Would it be asking too much if we delayed our return still another week? Our

mother's condition is uncertain, and we might be glad to tarry a few days more."

Mrs. Maxa assured them nothing would please her better than to keep Leonore several weeks. Could she see the child now? Her brother would secure the doctor's consent and send the carriage so the child could make the journey during the best hours of the day.

As one of the ladies led her to the invalid's upper room, she said, "Leonore's brother is here. He was traveling in Switzerland with his teacher and some friends but hastened on ahead to visit his sister. Tomorrow his companions will arrive and all will return to Germany together."

"Then the poor boy will lose his day with his sister if I carry her away," said Mrs. Maxa regretfully.

"That is unavoidable," interrupted the lady quickly. "The two can see one another again in Hanover where he is in school." Throwing open a door, she continued, "Leonore, I am bringing Mrs. Bergmann, who was your mother's friend. You will be happy over news she brings. And now, with your permission, madam, I will return to my work."

The sick child was dressed, but resting on her bed. Yes, Philip was right, thought Mrs. Maxa; she would have recognized the child anywhere, though the young Leonore gazed out of sad eyes and tears still clung to her eyelashes. The young boy bowed to Mrs. Maxa. He had the merry blue eyes and the open brow of his father. She held out her hand to him and then stepped to the bed to greet Leonore.

"Dear child," she said, grasping the small hands, "you are so like your blessed mother that I must greet you at once as my beloved child. We were so dear to one another! And I must call Salo my boy. You both bring your father and mother before my eyes. What happiness came to me through the friendship of your parents! Now that you have them no longer, you must be my children."

For answer Leonore took Mrs. Maxa's hand and held it in both of hers and Salo came up close to say confidingly, "Oh, I am so happy you have come! You will certainly help me console Leonore. She is frightened because she has to go to the hospital. She imagines she will die there all alone, and was crying because she thinks we may never see one another again.

There is nothing to be done, for to-morrow I have to go back to school."

"No," said Mrs. Maxa, "there is nothing to do about that, but Leonore must not feel she is all alone, for I will often visit her and then it is not altogether certain she will have to go to the hospital."

"Oh, yes, it is; they are taking me this morning," declared Leonore, and she grasped her hand again as though it were her safety anchor.

Mrs. Maxa said no more as she did not know what the doctor would decide, so she merely sought to calm Leonore, saying she would soon be with her brother, for the Misses Remke had said they would take her home as soon as she was well enough. But at these words Leonore sobbed, "I have no home! We have no home anywhere!"

"Yes, that is true; we have no home anywhere," exclaimed Salo sorrowfully. "But if you would only believe me, Leonore, it will not be long until I am through school and can do as I wish. Then I will find a cottage in the country and we will make it our home. I am going to own it even if I have to work twenty years to pay for it," and the lad stood as though grasping a

hoe and ready to begin toiling the ground at once.

Hasty steps were now heard, the door was suddenly opened and Miss Remke said, "The carriage is at the door. Please make haste; we must not keep the gentleman waiting. I am sure you will help me carry Leonore downstairs?"

Leonore was white as a sheet. Mrs. Maxa hesitated a little and said, "May I ask if the carriage is my brother's or—"

"Why, certainly!" declared the lady, hastily bringing some shawls and rugs from a closet. "Your brother has returned to give the driver instructions. We must not keep such a kind friend waiting."

Mrs. Maxa had already lifted Leonore and now said, "Just follow with her things. She is so light I can manage nicely alone."

As she went down the stairs, Mrs. Maxa said, "Now, Leonore, the doctor has consented that I take you home, and I will nurse you until you are well again. Are you glad to go with me? We know each other a little already, and I hope you will not feel that you are a stranger among us."

Leonore flung her arms around Mrs. Maxa's neck and clung so fast that she did not doubt her joy, even without the words, "Salo, Salo! Did you hear that?"

Salo had heard, but did not understand and he ran after his sister as fast as he could under the burden of rugs and shawls Miss Remke had piled in his arms.

Once at the carriage, Mrs. Maxa handed the little girl to her brother, who lifted her in. Then his eyes fell on the boy with his load of rugs. "True as I live, there stands young Salo!" he said joyfully. "Give me your hand, my boy! Your father was my best friend; we must be good friends too."

Salo was plainly astonished. This was indeed a strange way of being taken to a hospital. And it was still more strange that Leonore was smiling contentedly in her corner of the carriage.

"Must we say good-bye now?" asked Salo, jumping up on the carriage step so he could see his sister better.

"Salo," said Mrs. Maxa, "I was thinking you can go to Nolla with us, to see where Leonore is to stay. I will have you brought back tomor-

row in time to meet your friends. Will that be all right, Phipp?" she asked.

"Certainly, certainly!" replied her brother. "And I am coming too, if I may. This seems to be a little pleasure trip, and I want to belong to the party. Salo and I will occupy the seat above, and tomorrow I'll come back with my young friend."

Salo climbed up with sparkling eyes; he had just begun to understand this was not a journey to the hospital. Then with last farewells from all to the Remke ladies, the coach drove off into the valley.

Leonore was so tired that she leaned against Mrs. Maxa and fell asleep, still holding her hand and feeling she had found a mother.

Things were lively outside. Young Salo had to tell where he lived and what he was doing, and between times his companion called attention to noteworthy places they passed. Asked whether he had any memory of his father and mother, Salo said neither he nor his sister remembered anything about them. Their earliest recollections took them back to an estate in Holstein, where they lived with a great-aunt, their grandmother's sister. When they were five or six

"OH SEE THOSE CASTLE TOWERS! WHAT IS THE NAME OF THE CASTLE?"

years old, she died and they went to Hanover to be educated and still lived there.

Twice a year a relative of the aunt visited them, but he was such a cold, formal gentleman, his coming gave them no pleasure. It was he who had decided they were to remain in Hanover until Salo finished his studies. Then they were to choose for themselves where to live. "I know what I shall do first of all," said Salo with eyes alight, but just then the ancient castle came into view and he exclaimed, "Oh, see those castle towers! How beautiful! But it is all closed up, and surely no one lives there! Still it does not look like a ruin. What is the name of the castle?"

"Castle Wildenstein," and Mr. Falk gave the young Wallerstatten a searching look as he gazed up at the gray towers without one sign of sorrow. "He knows nothing about the castle of his fathers and the whole sad history," thought Uncle Philip. "So much the better for him!"

As the carriage drove up, Kathy alone came running out, the children being yet at school.

Tossing the reins into Salo's hands with the words, "Just keep quiet and the horses will not

move," Uncle Philip jumped down and opened the carriage door. He lifted Leonore out and carried her up to the room prepared for her, Mrs. Maxa following close behind. Then he hurried back, for he was a little uneasy at what might happen to the horses and carriage. What if the youngster drove on, and the horses became unruly? But no, there he sat quite erect, firmly holding the reins.

And now a light-footed group ran up loudly shouting, "Uncle Phipp! Uncle Phipp! Uncle Phipp!" for his unexpected return was sufficient cause for jubilation.

"Just look at that young nobleman up there!" Uncle Phipp exclaimed when he found resistance to eight arms was in vain. "*He* knows what it means to do his duty unflinchingly."

At that every arm dropped and all eyes turned to the occupant of the driver's seat. Once freed, the uncle helped Salo down and introduced him to the children. He had such a courteous and friendly greeting for each that the children expressed their immediate liking in a lively manner and Salo felt he had come among good friends.

When Uncle Phipp entered the house, he

called the children together and explained that on account of the sickness of the little girl they had brought back with them, their mother could not mingle with them for two or three days and none of them must go upstairs to the child's room. That was the doctor's order. If the attack proved a light one, the children would soon be allowed in the sickroom, to make Leonore's acquaintance and help nurse her. Mazli must go to Apollonie every morning for the day.

"It doesn't amount to much," said Uncle Phipp encouragingly. "Who is going to be crestfallen? Why, what if you were like the child upstairs? She has no mother. You can surely spare your mother for three short days, can you not? What follows? A grand time for you! Your mother will come downstairs and bring you a new playmate. Leonore is so lovable and sweet that Kurt will at once compose a dozen songs about her, Mea will love her dearly and Lippo will have someone to appreciate his virtues."

Uncle Phipp's description of their new playmate had awakened their lively sympathy and they offered so much assistance he had to cool

their ardor. He suggested a walk in order to show Salo the neighborhood, but when they looked around for the boy, he had disappeared, and Bruno too.

"They had the same idea," said Uncle Phipp. "Let us hunt for them; that will give us a bit of a run," and off they went.

Uncle Phipp had guessed correctly: Bruno had taken such a liking to his new friend that he wanted to keep him to himself, and while Uncle Phipp was talking to the younger children, led the guest out for a walk. Salo had been attracted to Bruno and the two quickly grew confidential as they wandered toward the castle mountain.

"Do you know why I am taking you up there?" asked Bruno, suddenly interrupting the talk.

"Because it is so lovely," and Salo paused to gaze across the meadows bright with flowers up to the gray castle over which glowed a brilliant evening sky.

"No," said Bruno, "but because that castle belongs to an uncle of yours."

Salo stared at him in amazement. "What are you thinking of, Bruno?" he asked. "That

would not be so bad, but there is nothing in it. We have only one uncle, and he's been in Spain for many, many years and expects to stay there always."

"Yes, it's that uncle in Spain to whom the castle belongs," asserted Bruno and he added that it was in that very castle their mothers had become such close friends. Salo admitted this, but was sure the castle had been sold and his uncle would never return; his great-aunt had said so. Bruno had to admit that the castle might have been sold if his uncle did not expect to return.

"You know, Salo, I would like to disappear for a long time as your uncle did," remarked Bruno as they walked along. "Then I would not be mixed up with that pair of boys. I can't stand it; I've told you what they are," for Bruno had already described the Knippel boys and their many contemptible traits. "If you were only with me, it might be better," he continued, "but when I am alone and they carry out their underhanded tricks against defenseless people, I get so furious I have to beat them. That makes an awful row, and my mother is unhappy. Oh, if I could only run away from that pair forever!"

"You would not want to run off if you knew what it is to have no home," said Salo. "You should never think things are hard to bear when you have a home and a mother to whom to tell everything. That thought ought to make you able to stand a lot. I shouldn't mind living with the pair during the school term if I could spend every holiday in a place that was really a home for Leonore and for me. I always keep thinking what I can do so she will not have to wait much longer before having a home. I am really glad she was taken sick and so has been allowed to come to you." Then looking more cheerful, he continued, "I hope she will be sick for quite a long while. Not seriously sick," he corrected himself, "but just sick enough so your mother will not let her go."

Bruno was deeply impressed. He had never thought that everyone did not have as lovely a home as he and a mother to love one and to share one's troubles. A deep sympathy seized him for his new friend and with all the fire of his nature turned to help in his cherished plan of establishing a home.

"From now on I will think of nothing else than how to make your wish come true," he said

to Salo. "Certainly between the two of us, we can find a way to succeed."

"That's wonderful of you!" said Salo, overcome by Bruno's warm interest. "I have all kinds of friends at the academy, yet there is not a single one to whom I could have confided what I have in mind. Will you be my friend?"

Bruno grasped the proffered hand firmly and with beaming eyes promised, "Yes, I will! All my life long I will be your friend, as you shall see. I wish I could do you a favor, as you have me."

"Oh, I have not been able to do you any favor as yet," said Salo in astonishment.

"But you have! Now that I have you for a friend, all my dread of living with that pair of boys has gone. I know I can let them do as they like; I can always remember I have a friend who thinks as I do and who sees their actions in the light I do. I can tell you everything and you will respond by telling me what you think. Thus I can let them go their way."

"Do you know what my idea of a true friendship is?" asked Salo, for the new bond had made him very happy. "I think it should be this way: when we experience anything that rouses our

anger because it is coarse or low or mean, we should instantly think: 'I have a friend who would never do that.' And when we experience something that pleases us exceedingly because it is fine and noble, we should instantly think: 'That is just what my friend would do.' Do you not agree?"

They now heard both their names called loudly, and looking around caught sight of Kurt and Lippo running toward them, Uncle Phipp following with Mea at a slower pace.

"Wait! Wait!" Kurt shouted so loudly that the echo resounded from the castle, "Wait! Wait!"

The two friends did so.

"You did not take Salo up to the castle?" asked Uncle Phipp in a voice that betrayed great excitement.

"Oh, no, uncle!" replied Bruno. "I only wished to show Salo the castle from here because it once belonged to his uncle."

"Good!" said the uncle in satisfaction. "Now for a quick trip back home. Who would think of half-starving a guest on his first visit? He won't be in a hurry to come again!"

"Oh, I certainly shall, Mr. ——" here Salo hesitated. "I have forgotten your name," he explained in confusion.

"Here I am called Uncle Phipp," said he. "Uncle Phipp, that's all."

"How jolly! Well, Uncle Phipp, I will come every time you invite me, and if you gave me nothing at all to eat, still I would come with the greatest pleasure."

"We don't run a starvation institution," replied Uncle Phipp, "and now we are going back to a little feast that I instructed Kathy to have ready."

Mazli stood in the doorway as the little company came merrily down the mountain. Kathy

had just told her that they were to have pancakes, apple-soufflé, sliced ham, sour milk, and sweet rolls in honor of the guest. Seizing Salo's hand, she led him to the inviting table, and as they feasted, Bruno sighed, "Oh, if Salo could only stay even one more day!" and all the other children begged Uncle Phipp to arrange it somehow.

"But tomorrow morning at ten my teacher and schoolmates are to meet me at Sils, and though I wish it more than anything else, I cannot stay," explained Salo.

"Salo knows what has to be, must be," said Uncle Phipp, "and you must not press him, but we'll be jolly during the hours we are to be together."

After supper Uncle Phipp started a merry game, but at exactly the minute when the mother always took the little children to bed, Lippo said dutifully, "Uncle Phipp, we must sing the evening hymn now and then Mazli and I must go to bed."

This did not suit Mazli at all and she climbed up behind her uncle's chair, threw her chubby arms around his neck and whispered in his ear, "Uncle Phipp, dear, you know this is a holiday.

Can't we stay up just a little longer? The game is so jolly and going to bed is such a dreadful bore!"

"Yes, today is a holiday, and the youngsters may stay up a little longer."

Mazli joyously hopped back to her place and Uncle Phipp's funny remarks increased the fun. In the frolic no one noticed how unusually quiet Mazli had grown until Salo said suddenly, "Oh, look! Mazli is fast asleep! And she is almost ready to topple off her chair!"

"Come, Mazli," said Uncle Phipp cheerfully, "open your eyes and Mea will put you to bed."

"No, no," whined Mazli and made never a move.

"Yes, come! We are all going," wheedled her uncle. "You do not wish to be left alone, do you?"

"No, no, no!" murmured Mazli drowsily.

"Mea, give her a little piece of cake," ordered the uncle. "Then she will wake up."

"We have no cake in the house, uncle," replied Mea.

"What? You don't have that greatest necessity in a household full of children? I must get some tomorrow," he declared. "Here is a piece

of candy, Mazli; come taste how sweet it is!" he coaxed.

"No, no, no," whined Mazli again.

"Can the child have caught the fever already? What's to be done now?" he asked in growing excitement.

Meanwhile Kathy had stepped into the room to see if anything was needed, and taking Mazli in her strong arms carried her off, saying, "This is the way, Mr. Falk," and in spite of all her protests, Mazli was put to bed and drifted off to sleep with no sign of fever.

"Ah, it's well to get through with that!" exclaimed Uncle Phipp when Kathy returned with that news. "I am thinking it is time we all seek our beds; Lippo looks as if he could not stand on his little legs any longer."

His uncle wanted to lead him off, but he clung to the piano, saying, "But, Uncle Phipp, we have not sung the evening hymn yet! We must do that first!"

"For pity's sake, is that on again?" exclaimed the disturbed man. "It's too late to do it now, but tomorrow night we will sing two hymns instead."

"Then we will have sung two hymns tomor-

row and none at all today," argued Lippo, still holding to the piano.

"It can't be helped," said Uncle Phipp in resignation, for he knew the tenacity of his godchild. "Kurt, find the shortest hymn in the book; otherwise we will be singing until morning. But wait, Kurt! There is no one who can play, so the song must have a tune that I can sing."

Kurt found a hymn, and Uncle Phipp led well. Lippo made little plaintive chirps but he sang to the end though he struggled with all his might to keep awake.

"Ah!" said Uncle Phipp as he reached the top of the stairs, "it means something to manage such a bunch of children! I am lucky to get through this day. What? Not yet? What do you want, Bruno?" as the boy drew his uncle to one side.

"Salo and I have so many things to talk over, and he has to be off early tomorrow morning. Won't you let Kurt sleep beside you in the guest-room? Then Salo could sleep in Kurt's bed in my room."

"What an idea!" exclaimed his uncle. "You should hear what your mother would say in the

morning! To have a Wallerstaetten as guest and offer him a bed that had been used! No, that cannot be; but I will sleep in your bed and you may go into the guest-room with Salo."

"Oh, thank you, Uncle Phipp! There is no other uncle like you!" declared Bruno.

CHAPTER VII

THE RESULT OF MOTHER'S ABSENCE

WHEN Salo went to say farewell next morning, Leonore looked so cheerful that he asked, "Are you feeling so much better today, Leonore?"

"Oh, yes! It is as pleasant here as though it were my own home," she replied, her eyes shining. "I feel as though our mother had come down from Heaven to nurse me."

"When you go downstairs and learn to know all the family, you will be delighted," said Salo enthusiastically.

"Oh, what a pity you have to go, Salo!" cried Leonore, but her tears did not keep on flowing. This was an altogether different parting than she had foreseen the day before.

Mrs. Maxa now returned, for she had left the room to give brother and sister a moment alone.

"I can't say now that I hope you will soon follow me, for I really wish you to stay here a long while," he said gayly.

As the carriage bowled along and Salo could

no longer hear the shouts, but only see the handkerchiefs waving their last good-bye, he furtively dashed away a few tears.

When the children returned home from school at noon, one after the other turned to the stairs, but there they met an unexpected obstacle. Lippo had missed his mother when he entered the house but immediately recalled her orders. Then it occurred to him the other children would forget and disobey. Hence when any of them started to dash upstairs, he caught them and called, "You must not! You must not!" so loudly his voice must have penetrated into the invalid's room.

Mazli was spending a happy day with Apollonie and was feasting on the snow-white bread and rich milk which she always served when Mazli was her guest. Today Loneli was unusually glad to have Mazli, for she told so much about Salo, how he was more friendly and nicer than any other boy; Bruno, Mea and Kurt all three agreed, though usually they did not see things alike. Apollonie listened too, nodding her head now and then as though to say, "Yes, of course, since his name is Salo!" and the interesting conversation kept her in her chair

much longer than it was usual for her to tarry at the table.

Suddenly she jumped up in alarm. "Is it possible it is already after one o'clock? Hurry, hurry, Loneli; you must not be late at school! Mazli and I have something to attend to; we have to take a walk."

But first Apollonie washed the dishes and set them in an exact row, while Mazli watched. Then she put on a fresh apron and a pretty neckerchief, packed some shirts, handkerchiefs and stockings in a great basket and the two started off.

"Where are we going now?" Mazli asked, eying the great basket.

"These things belong to Mr. Trius," answered Apollonie. "We are going up to the castle as far as the great iron gates. I will ring the bell and Mr. Trius will come and take the basket. You can look through the gate until he brings back the empty basket."

"Can I see the garden and the mignonette mama loved so much?"

"Yes, the garden is there," sighed Apollonie, "but one would have to search to find even a few stalks of mignonette."

"One need only go inside to find them," said Mazli with assurance.

"Why, what are you thinking of, Mazli? Mr. Trius allows no one to go into the garden and up to the castle," Apollonie said emphatically. "If one might, how gladly I would have gone long ago! Oh, how things must look in the castle! If I could go in just to do the things most needed!" she went on, forgetting in her grief and longing that she was speaking to a very little girl.

"You should not bring him so many shirts and stockings if he will not let you into the garden!" said Mazli in anger.

"No, no, Mazli! Those are his shirts and stockings; I have only washed and mended them," explained Apollonie. "Mr. Trius cannot do just as he chooses. Do you see up there where the window is open—no, you cannot see it yet. But up there is an invalid, the Baron. He is master and can give his orders which one must obey. He wants no one to go into the garden. There, now you can see the open windows quite plainly!"

"Can I see the bad Baron too?" asked Mazli, gazing up searchingly.

"I did not say he was bad, Mazli; only that he could command," Apollonie corrected her. "You cannot see him; he lies sick in his room. Look, there are the lovely raspberry bushes!" and Apollonie pointed to the untrimmed bushes that climbed up the castle slope. "Oh, how different it used to be! Two well-kept hedges of berry bushes used to provide feasts for the girls and boys with plenty left for me to make into jam. But now! what does it all look like?"

"Does Mr. Trius bring his thick stick when he comes to the gate?" Mazli asked, looking around cautiously.

"He never goes without it, but you have nothing to fear. He won't harm you, and I would not advise him to. Look, there he comes already! He was spying; he sees everything that goes on."

Mr. Trius, stick in hand, was at the great gate. Opening it, he said, "That's all right!" took the basket and would have closed the gate immediately.

"No, no, Mr. Trius, that is not the way," objected Apollonie, pushing the gate back with a strong hand and placing herself in the opening. "I do everything promptly and as it should be done, and gladly because you belong to the castle. But now you can grant me at least one word. I only wish to know how the gentleman is doing."

"The same," was the answer.

"The same,—what does that mean?" she retorted. "Do you know how he sleeps? And do you cook the right things for him? What does he eat?"

"Venison and wild boar."

"What? Is that what you serve him? Such heavy meats? Is that the kind of food for an invalid? And what does the doctor say to all this?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing? He must tell you what the sick man should eat! What doctor have you? A good one, of course? Did you fetch the one from Sils? He is careful."

"No."

"Who then?"

"None."

Apollonie threw up her hands in horror. "There lies the Baron sick and forsaken and no one fetches a doctor! If his blessed mother only knew how things are going up there! Let me in! The master shall not see me; I will only cook something that will do him good, just peep in to see how the room looks, and if he will get up a moment I will make the bed. I will do anything you ask, only let me do for him!" she begged.

"Forbidden!" was the short answer.

"But I am no stranger," persisted Apollonie. "I served in the house for thirty years and know how things should be and what the master should

have. Things are not going as they should, I know that. I will come once a day for an hour only, and do just what is necessary."

"Entrance is forbidden to all," declared the unchangeable Trius. Apollonie's pleading or anger made no difference to him.

Now suddenly she called out in fright, "Where is the child? For the love of Heaven, where did she go? She has surely run up into the garden!"

Mr. Trius was also stirred to activity. He slammed the gate, turned the immense key and ripped it quickly out of the lock for it was easily seen that in her excitement Apollonie was capable of anything.

"Witches!" he muttered in anger and waved his stick in a threatening manner as he ran toward the castle.

"Mr. Trius!" Apollonie shouted after him, "if you dare touch that child you will have to settle with me! Do you hear? Put your stick down; it is sure to frighten her if she sees it!" But he had disappeared.

While they had been engaged in controversy, Mazli had slipped between them and wandered toward the castle. She must soon reach the

garden with its lovely flowers. Such wild briers and thickets as those grew in the common meadows. This was not what Mazli had expected. So she stepped on the castle terrace, to try to locate the flower garden from there. At one end of the terrace something glowed under the great pine tree. She ran toward it. No, it was not flowers; it was a tawny lion's skin that shone in the sun. Mazli went closer to learn what was under it. Now a head was lifted and two black eyes were suddenly directed on her. It was a man stretched out on the long chair and covered with the rug. As soon as she saw that, she approached and asked familiarly, "Do you know where the beautiful old mignonette bushes grow which my mama used to see in the castle garden?"

"No," he replied abruptly.

"Then perhaps Mr. Trius knows, but one dare not ask him. Are you afraid of Mr. Trius too?"

"No."

"But he always goes around with a heavy stick! Kurt made a song which tells about everything Mr. Trius does," Mazli chattered on. "It goes this way:

'Old Trius is the castle-guard
And loves to beat the boys.
To wield his heavy wooden stick
Is one of his chief joys.'

I don't know any more; it is quite long. Now he's going to write a song about Salo, because he is so nice. He said so this morning and Bruno declared if he wrote a stupid song he would tear it up."

"Is everybody here called Salo and Bruno?" asked the man hotly.

"No, not a single soul except Bruno, my brother," explained Mazli, "and Salo who came only yesterday and went again today. He didn't want to go and we wished to keep him, but he was not allowed to stay. And when his sister is well again, she must leave too; she is called Leonore."

"Who sent you here?" thundered the gentleman and Mazli looked up at him in astonishment to reply:

"Nobody sent me; no one knows where I am, not even Apollonie. I just ran on because Apollonie had so much to say to Mr. Trius and I wanted to hunt for mignonette. I have been visiting Apollonie because mama is upstairs all

day nursing Leonore. I don't obey Kathy very well, and now that she has to do the cooking, I come to Apollonie every day. Oh, there he comes!" and in her fright she pressed close to her new acquaintance to seek protection. "You'll help me, won't you, if he tries to hurt me?" she whispered.

Mr. Trius came running toward them but when the gentleman waved his hand slightly Mr. Trius turned and disappeared the way he had come.

"Won't he do anything to me when I get to the gate?" asked Mazli, moving a little away from her protector, for in her fear she had clutched him tightly.

"No," was the short answer but the voice was not so harsh as at first.

She was so grateful to him for sending Mr. Trius away that now she wished to do him a favor, and asked sympathetically, "Do you always have to sit here all alone? Does nobody come to see you?"

"No."

"Oh, then I will come again," said Mazli consolingly. "Does the bad Baron ever come into the garden?" she asked anxiously.

"Who?" came the counter question.

"Don't you know?" in astonishment. "He is up there where the windows are open." Then she stepped close to the chair to whisper, "A

sick Baron lies up there, and though Apollonie says he's not bad, I have noticed everyone is afraid of him. Aren't you afraid of him too?" she asked.

"No."

"Then I'm not either," declared Mazli, for a

gentleman who could shoo away the mighty Trius and was not afraid of the bad master of the castle would be able to protect her from every danger. "Now I am going home, but I'll come again soon," and she prettily offered her hand in polite farewell, though she could say no more because she knew neither his name nor his proper title.

"I am the castle-steward," said he, coming to her aid and when she had taken her leave in the correct way, she ran back to the gate.

Sure enough, there stood Mr. Trius inside and Apollonie outside.

"God be praised, you are back again!" she exclaimed as Mazli slipped through the gate Mr. Trius now held open. "How frightened I have been! How could you run away from me like that? You see I did not know what had become of you!"

"You had nothing to fear," said Mazli calmly as they walked. "I was with the castle-steward and no one need be afraid with him, not even of Mr. Trius."

"What? With the castle-steward? What are you talking about, Mazli? Who told you it was the castle-steward?" Apollonie was as ex-

cited as though Mazli had been threatened with all sorts of dangers.

"He told me so himself, and he was all alone under the big tree. He always sits there alone, but I will go back again to see him soon," Mazli informed her.

"No, no! What are you thinking of, Mazli? If he did not ask you, you must not go on your own account. However, Mr. Trius will take care that you do not get in again," concluded Apollonie.

"He won't dare stop me," Mazli said with a little scorn.

Now one of Loneli's greatest pleasures was to go to Mrs. Maxa's house, for Kurt and Mea were her best friends. The obliging little girl was often asked to be go-between when the school children had quarreled, and today Mea had sent her to Elvira with an offer of peace. Two previous efforts had been scorned but rather than stand this sulking, Mea decided to try once more. Catching a glimpse of her ambassador, she hurried to meet her.

"Elvira says I am to tell you she will never be friends with you as long as she lives," reported disheartened Loneli.

Mea reflected that she had only reproached her friend for an unjust act, nothing more, and then declared without a hint of sadness, "Elvira may sulk through all eternity! There are other people in the world, and today I wanted to tell Elvira who has been staying with us. You see, Loneli, the nicest boy about Bruno's age paid us a visit, and his sister is sick upstairs. We are not allowed to see her, but I can hardly wait till she comes downstairs. If she is at all like her brother, then she is the nicest girl we have ever seen."

Loneli's bright eyes sparkled at the description and she asked eagerly, "Do you know her name?"

"Leonore," Mea replied.

"Oh!" ejaculated Loneli. "My grandmother knew a young lady once named Leonore and is always saying she was just like an angel."

"I am glad if Leonore is not like an angel for then she might not be my friend," said Mea hastily. "Elvira surely isn't an angel and every few weeks she gives me notice her friendship is ended."

"Perhaps that is because she is so far from being an angel," suggested Loneli, at which they

both laughed. Frequently Loneli's words threw just the right light on a subject.

At this moment a shrill cry of "Mama's coming, mama's coming!" sounded from the house.

Watchman Lippo had again posted himself at the stairs on his return from school, and found plenty of work. First Kurt forgot the ban and then Bruno tried to slip quietly up to his mother, which brought forth a hullaballoo from Lippo. Last came a strange gentleman who was halfway up the stairs with two bounds before Lippo caught him by the coat tails, calling out loudly, over and over again, "You must not! You must not!"

The gentleman turned about laughingly to say, "I am the doctor, little boy, and so I may pass."

Soon after the doctor had departed, Lippo raised the shout, "Mama's coming!" The children had not expected her release for another day or two, and now all rushed in, Loneli with them.

"Tomorrow, children, tomorrow!" the mother said, warding off their clamor for attention. "I wished to send some word to Apollonie, so I am glad Loneli is here," and Mrs. Maxa pro-

ceeded to explain that Leonore's fever had left her, but she was so weak she must spend several days in bed and therefore needed a nurse. Now if Apollonie could arrange to come, the nursing would not be difficult; Loneli need only remember to tell Apollonie the sick girl's name was Leonore.

A storm of questions followed, but Mrs. Maxa disappeared again into the sickroom, saying, "Tomorrow I'll listen!"

Apollonie was on hand next morning long before the household was astir, and when Mrs. Maxa tinkled her call-bell, she hastened to answer it. Mrs. Maxa opened the door, and there sat Leonore in her bed, wide awake. Her thick hair fell in curls over her shoulders, while the earnest eyes gazed with wonder on the woman who regarded her as tears coursed down her cheeks.

"Oh, oh!" she said when she could control her emotion, "one does not need to ask who her parents were! Ah, it is as though old times had returned! Yes, that is the way she looked when she came to the castle; only she was not quite so pale."

"Leonore," said Mrs. Maxa, "Apollonie knew

your mother as well as your father, so I thought she would make a dear nurse for you."

"Oh," Leonore replied, holding out her hand affably to Apollonie, "will you tell me everything you know about them?"

How gladly Apollonie would do that! But just now all she could do was to wipe the tears away.

A jubilation started when Mrs. Maxa went downstairs and announced she would now stay with her children, for the separation had been longer and harder to bear than she had thought. Bruno suggested her time should be divided so that each got a fair share, there was so much to tell, and if they all were to talk at once, none would be understood. "So the first hour after school from eleven to twelve belongs to me as the oldest," he declared.

"My turn comes from one to two!" exclaimed Mea.

"I come from four to five," said Kurt, very well satisfied.

Mrs. Maxa expected Bruno's interview to be one last fervent attempt to escape living with the Knippel boys, and great was her astonishment to find his sole thought now how to help

Salo establish a home. His mother must surely have some advice to offer! She explained how gladly she would help after Salo had finished his studies, but she had no right to meddle in the training of these children, and Bruno left her sadly and silently.

Mea came forth from her talk radiating happiness, for her mother had told her how eager Leonore was to meet her, because they were the same age. Mea was enthused over the prospect of a new friend, and could talk of nothing else. That evening when she had said, "Mother, you will not let Leonore go away immediately she comes downstairs and the doctor says she is well, will you?" Kurt exclaimed, "Well, I see I really must compose a song on the violent new friendship!"

Mea flew at her brother. "Indeed, Kurt, you shall do nothing of the kind!"

"Mea, Mea!" remonstrated the mother. "You know I will do all in my power to keep her with us as long as possible, but—"

"But if you address your poor brother in such a shocking manner, she will take flight and never be seen again," said Kurt, completing his mother's unfinished sentence.

"My dear Kurt," said his mother, "I am able to finish my sentences without your help. What I wanted to say was that I cannot do very much, for the ladies will make plans for Leonore. I do admit, however, there is some truth in Kurt's words, for Leonore is such a refined little girl she might easily be shocked at such a show of temper, Mea."

Two days later when Mrs. Maxa asked the doctor when his patient could leave her room he replied, "Tomorrow. Lively playmates will do her good now." Going downstairs he met Apollonie carrying the supper tray. "That's right! The very sight of those good things will give her an appetite."

"She eats like a little bird," said Apollonie. "How is she doing, doctor? Is she going to get quite well again? Is she not just like an angel from Heaven?"

"I do not know them very well, but she may be," he said. "We will pull her through with your good nursing."

No event had ever been awaited with more impatience than the appearance of Leonore in the family circle. As soon as the children came from school at noon, their mother led her down,

and she greeted one child after the other as though they were old acquaintances. This pleased them immensely, for they had felt she must be different from themselves and had been rather awed at meeting her. Mrs. Maxa seated her in a corner of the sofa, and the children surrounded her, each eager to be her special friend, and soon her face grew quite rosy and her eyes danced as she listened to their plans.

When it was time for Mea to set the table for lunch, she ran to her mother and asked if she might take Apollonie's place in Leonore's room; she would be only too glad to wait on her at night. Mrs. Maxa consented, for she had found special nursing was no longer necessary, and in emergency she was always within quick reach.

"I'll never forget how kind you have been to me," Leonore said affectionately when Apollonie bade her good-bye after lunch, "and as soon as I can go outdoors, I will pay you a visit at your cottage."

After she had gone Leonore told the children how Apollonie had described the happy life at the great castle, but she had said she only wished for a small place that she and Salo could call their own. Then Apollonie suggested they

might live with her; she could let them have all the cottage except one little room and she could serve them. "Wouldn't that be lovely?" asked Leonore.

"Yes, you would like it there. Loneli is so obliging and Apollonie cooks what one likes best," said Mazli quickly, while Kurt sang out:

"Hungry sparrows and greedy starlings,
Gobblers too, our little darlings!"

Before Mazli could ask her mother what the word gobblers meant, Mrs. Maxa said, "Dear Leonore, do not set your heart on something which can only bring disappointment. Your first walk shall be to Apollonie's cottage so you can see it. But even if the tiny place would do, the chief obstacle is that it will be years before Salo is through his schooling."

"On that very account it would be lovely for me to live with kind Apollonie. Salo could come to us for his holidays, and when he is through with his studies, he could stay here and we would be close to you all."

It was evident Leonore had thought much about this, and Mrs. Maxa did not have the heart to dash all her hopes to the ground, preferring to have the first visit to Apollonie convince her the plan was impossible.

A week had passed since Leonore had come downstairs. Mea not only spent the day with her, as did the other children, but had the night hours with her too, and these were passed in such intimacy she was enchanted with her new friend. Wonderful to relate, Kurt had not composed a single ditty as he always did when Mea threw herself into a new friendship. This time

it looked as though he himself was stricken with the friendship-fever, as he was in the habit of calling Mea's condition under such circumstances. Bruno, who had always been engrossed in books when out of school, now joined the jolly circle. The little convalescent had won Lippo's heart because she was always ready to listen to his experiences, and often shielded him from the gibes of the other children. Every now and again he would say, "Please stay with us always, Leonore. You can be at home here if you do not have any other," and the thought would bring the quick blood to Leonore's face, for it was one she dared not cherish. Mazli's love manifested itself in a resolve to see that Apollonie's cottage was made as pretty as could be when Leonore went there to live. Indeed there must have been something especially fine in Leonore's personality to win all the household, even Kathy, the maid. There was only one thing about her that caused regret: even in the midst of the merriest conversation sadness would shadow her face, and though she did her best, she could not always regain her happy mood.

Several days later the children took Leonore

for her first walk over the hill. Hearing their laughter as they returned, Mrs. Maxa stepped out of the garden into the road to welcome them. "Leonore looks like a fresh apple-blossom," she said very tenderly, holding her face between her two hands that she might enjoy the color that flushed the delicate cheeks.

At that moment a beggar-woman approached, leading a little girl by each hand, whose scanty ragged clothes scarcely covered their poor little bodies.

Looking at Mrs. Maxa, the beggar-woman said, "Yes, yes, one can be happy with children when one has a home! But it would be better for two such homeless ones as mine not to exist. They will remain homeless all their lives, the saddest of fates."

"May I give them these?" Leonore asked in a low voice, quickly taking off her neckerchief and jacket.

The beggar-woman understood the action and stretched out her hand to Leonore, saying, "The young lady's heart goes out to the homeless, even if she does not know what that means. God bless her!"

Leonore looked pleadingly at Mrs. Maxa, who

nodded approval, for it was too late to explain that some other course would have been better. The poor woman would have kissed Leonore's hand in gratitude, but she had instantly run away, Mea after her. She found her lying on the sofa, head buried in her arms, crying bitterly.

"What's the matter, Leonore?" asked the shocked Mea, but Leonore was unable to answer until the others had surrounded her in amazement and sympathy. Then she sobbed, "I am just like that! Just such a homeless one! And those who are homeless stay so all their lives. The woman said so, and I believe it too! One is unable to look for a home, and without looking, how can a person find one?"

Mrs. Maxa witnessed her passionate grief with anxiety, and then motioning to the children to go into the garden for a while, sat down beside Leonore, took her hand in hers and waited till the violent weeping ceased. Then lovingly, "Leonore, do you remember how in the sickroom upstairs you told me you had found a hymn among your mother's music which you always sang when you thought you were losing courage and faith? That it taught you God was always

thinking and caring for you and Salo? Can you recite the words of the verse you loved the most?"

"Oh, yes," said Leonore. "That verse ran:

'Lord, Thou who doest all things well,
No gift I wish but just Thy will.
The best for us we cannot tell;
More than we ask Thou dost fulfill.'

Yes, when I cling to that thought I feel much better," added Leonore in quite another tone. "I am happy when I remember God can do for Salo and me what we cannot do for ourselves. But when it seems there is no prospect of anything being different, it is hard to trust. And the woman said those who are homeless stay so all their lives."

"No, no, Leonore," Mrs. Maxa answered. "You must not accept the statement of that troubled woman as an unchangeable truth. You cannot foresee your future, but you *can* keep on asking God to care for you, and then leave it to Him. That will keep you from making restless plans, which only bring fresh disillusions."

Leonore stared thoughtfully before her, then said, "Aunt Maxa"—she had used this form of address for some time—"must I no longer think

about Apollonie's cottage? Will hoping to make that my home bring disappointment to Salo and me, too?"

"Yes, my child. It is absolutely impossible for you and your brother to live there. I am very certain of it, or I would not shatter your hope."

"Then I will think no more about it, but only rejoice that I may still remain with you," declared Leonore, throwing her arms around Mrs. Maxa with whole-souled confidence.

Later that same evening when all were merry again, a letter came from Hanover. Mrs. Maxa had written how gratified she was at Leonore's convalescence, but added the doctor thought several weeks in the invigorating mountain air necessary for her complete recovery; that she herself wished nothing better than to keep her as long as possible. This letter brought expressions of gratitude and an acceptance of her continued kindness for two weeks more, when one of them would come for Leonore.

Mrs. Maxa looked with heavy heart at the child she had learned to love as her own. She could well understand the ladies did not make much of a home for Leonore. She knew only

too well how hard it would be for the child to leave, and this increased her sadness. But she had no right over the child; there was nothing she could do, and, folding the letter, she decided not to mar the children's happy evening by telling her the news.

CHAPTER VIII

MAZLI GOES VISITING

Of late Mazli had considered it her pleasant duty to entertain Leonore while the other children were at school. But now that they were home for a holiday, Mea claimed Leonore's time and finding herself without her usual employment, Mazli ran to her mother to say, "I must really visit Apollonie today. She has been expecting me every day, and I am sure Loneli is sad because I have stayed away from the cottage so long."

She was permitted to go that afternoon, and on her way her mind was busy with a new idea. She had just seated herself in her little chair by Loneli when she said, "Today I must visit the castle-steward. I promised long ago, but forgot."

"No, no, Mazli; we have other matters to attend to," said Apollonie, trying to divert her thoughts. "We must see if the plums are getting ripe and you must see the little chicks also."

"But after I have seen them, I must visit the

castle-steward. I promised," Mazli persisted stubbornly.

"He will have forgotten that long ago," Apollonie said. "Does your mother know you mean to go?"

"No; the idea only came to me on the way here," explained Mazli. "One must always keep a promise at any price, Kurt says."

"Mr. Trius won't let you in," objected Apollonie next.

"But he has to! I know the castle-steward well, and he is not the least afraid of Mr. Trius; I saw that," said Mazli.

Apollonie resolved to entertain her with the chicks and other things so it would be too late to go up to the castle. Mazli watched the little chicks with amusement and inspected the ripening plums, but did everything in a hurry, then said with determination, "Now I must go at once, because it is so far. Loneli can come with me; we'll find our way all right."

"What can you be thinking of?" exclaimed Apollonie. "Mr. Trius would give you a fine reception if you asked him to go in. No, if you must go, I will go too," and Apollonie went in to change her dress, for to go to the castle in her

working clothes would never do, even though she did not meet a soul.

Mr. Trius was at the gate before they even rang the bell. He glanced savagely at Mazli, but, without waiting to hear what Apollonie wished to say, opened the gate enough for the child to slip through, which she did. Instantly the gate was closed.

"I would not push through even if you did not fasten the gate," said Apollonie, a little offended. "But when I have a child under my care, I like to know where it goes. Please let me in so I can watch her; that is all I want to do."

"Forbidden!" said Mr. Trius.

"Then why did you let the child in?"

"Orders!"

"Orders? The master's orders?" cried out Apollonie. "Just see here, Mr. Trius, does the master say a child whom he does not know is to be let in when the aged servant who should look after the castle is not allowed inside? You have not told him that I come again and again, wishing to put things in order! You don't wish me to do so, yet you do not even know which bed he sleeps in, or if there are slips

on his pillows. You told me so yourself! If the blessed Baroness knew, she would have no peace in her grave. And you are to blame, I see that now!" but the undisturbed Mr. Trius resumed his patrolling.

Mazli had run up the hill to the terrace. Sure enough, the gentleman was stretched out on his long chair, just as she had seen him before, the rug spread over his knees.

"Good day, Mr. Castle-Steward! Are you a little cross with me for not coming for so long?" she called from a distance. Then running to him, she exclaimed, "It was all on account of Leonore. But she must not be left by herself while the others are at school, and I am glad to stay with her for she is so nice. Everybody loves Leonore, Kurt and Bruno too. You ought to know her; you would like her right away, I know."

"Is that so?" said the gentleman, something like a smile playing around his mouth. "Is she your sister?"

"My sister! No, indeed!" declared Mazli in astonishment at his error. "She is Salo's sister, but he had to go back to Hanover. She will too, directly she is well again. That makes

mama sad, and Mea even cries about it. Leonore doesn't want to go either, and one time she cried frightfully, because as long as she lives she must be homeless. That is what the beggar-woman who had the two ragged children told her. They were homeless, and Leonore said, 'I am too!' and cried a lot because she had no home, no papa, nor anything at all. But she isn't homeless and in rags like the others. She looks quite different and now she can make her home with Apollonie in the cottage at the foot of the hill, and Salo can come for his holidays; then they will have a home. But mama thinks that cannot be. Leonore would like it so much! I will bring her to see you some day."

"Who are you, child? What is your name?" he asked abruptly.

Mazli gazed at him in surprise, then said, "I am Mazli, and mama has the same name, but they don't call her by it. They say the Lady Pastor, or mama, and Uncle Phipp calls her Maxa, and Leonore Aunt Maxa."

"Is your father the pastor of Nolla?" was the next quick question.

"He's in Heaven, you know. Even long before we came here he was in Heaven, and mama

wanted to come back to Nolla because this was her home. We don't live in the parsonage now but over where there is a garden with little paths with a great currant bush in each corner—there and there and there," and Mazli used her forefinger and the lion skin to show exactly where the bushes stood. When the castle-steward settled back in his chair and said no more, Mazli asked sympathetically, "Is it tiresome here for you?"

"Yes indeed!" was the answer.

"Haven't you any picture-book?"

"No."

"Oh, then I'll bring you one! I'll come again soon and then—but perhaps you have a headache?" broke off Mazli. "When my mama draws her forehead together like that she has a headache, and I have to bring her cold water so it will get better. I will fetch some quickly," and she ran off.

"Stop, child!" the gentleman called out after her. "There is no one in the castle and you won't find any."

It seemed strange to Mazli that no one should be there to carry a little water to the castle-steward, and calling back, "I'll find somebody,"

she ran down the slope to the gate near which Mr. Trius was marching back and forth, stick in hand.

"You are to go up to the castle-steward this moment," she said, standing stockstill in front

of him. "You must take him some cold water because he has a headache; but be quick about it!"

Mr. Trius cast an angry look at Mazli as much as to say, "How dare you come to me like that?"

Then he flung open the gate. "Get out first so I can lock up!" he growled.

After Mazli had hopped out, he banged it so it rattled on its hinges, gave the immense key two turns and shot the bolt.

Apollonie had been sitting in the shade, and now went to meet her. "You were up there a long while," she said. "What had the gentleman to say?"

"Very little, but I told him a lot," reported Mazli. "He had a headache and just think, no one brings him cold water, and Mr. Trius stops to fasten the gate before he goes."

At this news Apollonie broke out into such loud lamentations that Mazli was roused to say, "But by this time he has had water, Apollonie! Mr. Trius would surely fetch it for him. Don't grieve any more!"

"What he does or does not do no one knows," complained Apollonie as they walked homeward. "The master is sick, and his one servant stumbles around the estate, never asking what he needs and letting everything go to destruction. Not a single head of cabbage or a hill of beans to be seen! No strawberries, no raspberries, no golden apricots, not a single peach! Such man-

agement! And here where the Baroness kept such order!" Apollonie wiped away her tears at the memory. "You do not understand, Mazli," she said when she had grown a little calmer. "You see I would gladly give a finger of my right hand if I could only go up there one day each week and put everything in order for the master, and lay out the garden and vegetable beds. The old soldier gives him dreadful stuff to eat, I know!"

When Mazli reached home she wanted to tell her mother all that had happened, but Bruno had just read aloud a letter from Salo and it had caused a tumult of grief. It brought them definite news that within ten days one of the ladies would come to take Leonore back with her. Salo added that the pleasure of her return was taken from him when he thought how hard it would be for her to leave them all. Leonore herself sat silent in the midst of the excited circle, but try as she would she could not choke back the rising flood of tears.

"Mother, do help us! Write to the ladies not to come. Don't let Leonore go!" implored Mea.

Bruno declared passionately no one had the right to drag an invalid off on a journey against

the doctor's wishes; the last time the doctor called he said Leonore ought to have another month in the mountains.

Kurt added: "It's altogether cruel, mother, altogether cruel! We wish to keep her, you wish to keep her and she wants to stay! To take her away by force is cruelty!"

Lippo pressed close to Leonore. "Don't cry, Leonore," he said, encouragingly. "As soon as I am big Uncle Phipp has promised to give me a house and wide meadows. I'll be a landlord then and write to you to come to live with me, and Salo can come for his holidays."

Leonore could not help smiling at his words, but her tears fell faster than ever when she thought of how many loved ones she must leave, perhaps forever.

Into the midst of this scene came Mazli, happy and bubbling with her castle experience. They were too much excited to listen to anything concerning the castle-steward; for to them the castle-steward meant Mr. Trius and who had any special interest in him?

The next morning Mea looked so unhappy her mother could not let her go to school without offering some comfort. "You shall go these

next two days, Mea, but next week you may stay at home with Leonore all the time."

Leonore was so much paler during these last days that Mrs. Maxa watched her with anxiety. Was her recovery not so complete as she had thought, that the prospect of departure wrought such a change? Mrs. Maxa went about silent and depressed, for she loved the child as her own. The strain was severe on all. Bruno spoke no word, Kurt stood scribbling his distressed thoughts in his notebook, though this time he composed no ditties. Lippo followed Leonore around, offering words of comfort. Mazli alone happily faced the future.

"You can walk up to Apollonie's with Leonore, Mazli," said her mother one day when the other children had gone back to school after lunch. "We must keep her outdoors or she will grow pale again."

Mazli willingly brought her hat, and the two girls set out. A little way across the garden Mazli stood stockstill. "I have to go back a moment. You just wait here. I'll be back immediately."

Indeed, she did return quickly, a picture-book under each arm.

As she reached Leonore, she began, "You see up there at the castle under a big tree sits the sick castle-steward. I promised to take him a picture-book. I am taking two; that will please him all the more. I also promised to bring you. I am taking something else, though I do not know why he wants it. But we will hear when we get there. Now let's go!"

"But, Mazli, I don't know him and he doesn't know me," Leonore objected. "I can't go, for perhaps he would not like it. Besides, your mother does not know."

But Mazli had no intention of changing her plans and argued, "But I have everything I want to take, and the castle-steward is waiting for us. You must see we have to go! Mama says we must visit the sick and take them things that will do them good. He gets frightfully lonesome and has a headache from sitting the whole day under that tree, and nobody visits him or takes him anything. It's not nice of you not to go with me when he is expecting us!"

Mazli waxed so earnest that Leonore replied: "I will be glad to go if you think he will be pleased."

So Mazli chattered merrily as she led Leonore

along the path between the fragrant meadows and under the apple trees up to the gate. It was not necessary to ring the bell; Mr. Trius had been watching their approach and now did not move.

"Please open quickly!" said Mazli. "We want to visit the castle-steward."

"Two, no!" was the answer.

"Yes, he expects us," asserted Mazli. "I promised I would bring Leonore, so open the gate!"

But Trius did not move, and Leonore said quietly, "Come, Mazli, let us go back. You see he will not open it, and perhaps he must not do so."

But Mazli said obstinately, "If he won't open, I'll scream out so that the castle-steward will hear. *Then* he will say something. He expects us and I can shout very loud. Just listen! Mr. Castle-Steward!" and her shrill voice must have carried far.

"Be still, you little demon!" commanded Mr. Trius, blue with rage, but nevertheless he quickly opened the gate.

"Perhaps we ought not to go in after all," said Leonore, but Mazli pulled her along and

never let go her hand until they were on the terrace. Taking the second picture-book which Leonore was carrying, she tucked it under her arm and began to run, saying, "Come along, Leonore! Do hurry! Don't you see him sitting there?"

"Good-day, Mr. Castle-Steward! I've come back quickly, haven't I?" she called out merrily. "And I've brought everything I promised. Here are the picture-books—two of them, for one quickly finishes with just one." She laid the books on the lion skin and fumbled in her pocket. "There, I brought that too!" and she put a tiny ivory whistle in his hand. "Kurt gave it to me and now I make you a present of it so that when you have a headache and Mr. Trius is a long way off, all you need to do is whistle and he will bring you some water. Just try it; it whistles splendidly! And I have brought Leonore with me too."

The gentleman started slightly and looked around, for Leonore had stood timidly behind the chair until now when Mazli pulled her forward. He darted a piercing look at the delicate girl who scarcely dared raise her large dark eyes to him. Under his steady gaze she flushed rosy

and said in a low voice, "Perhaps we should not come up here, but Mazli thought we ought. Can't we do something for you? Perhaps Mazli should not have brought anyone with her, and in that case I am very sorry!"

"Not at all! Mazli meant well by me to bring her companion," said the gentleman not at all unpleasantly. "What is your name?"

"Leonore von Wallerstaetten," and then noticing the two big books on his knees, she added, "May I lay the books aside? They are probably heavy for you."

"Yes, you may, but it was kind of Mazli to

carry them up for me," he said. "I will look at them later."

"May I straighten your pillow too? It can't be comfortable like that," said Leonore, pulling the cushion back into place.

"Yes, that feels good, very good," said the invalid and settled back comfortably in his chair.

"Oh, what a pity! It has fallen down again," said Leonore regretfully. "It ought to be tied. If only I had a needle and thread! But perhaps tomorrow we may—" but she suddenly paused in embarrassment. Perhaps she was making too free. However, Mazli quickly rescued the situation by calmly announcing they would come again the next day and bring what was necessary.

Then the castle-steward asked Leonore where she came from and where she lived, so she told him how she had lived with her brother in a boarding-school in Hanover since they had lost their great-aunt several years ago.

"Have you no other relatives?" he asked, watching her closely.

"No; only an uncle who has lived in Spain for many years, and my aunt told us he would never

come back; that no one knows where he is. If we had known we would have written to him, and Salo would go to him as soon as he was permitted, and I should have gone in any case."

"Why?" asked the gentleman.

Leonore looked at him in amazement. "He is our father's brother and we could love him like a father. He is the only soul who belongs to us, and we have always wished we could look him up, because we might live with him."

"No, you couldn't do that. I know him; I was in Spain too," said the castle-steward abruptly.

Leonore's face lighted up as though some great happiness had entered her heart, and asked eagerly, "You know our uncle? You know where he is? Oh, tell me what you know about him!" and she gazed up so expectantly that he thought a bit before replying, "No, you can never look him up. Your uncle is a sick old man, and young folks could not possibly live with him. He should stay in his old owl's nest. No, you cannot go to him."

"But if he is all alone, and old, and ill, we should go to him more quickly than if he had a family," countered Leonore. "He can be our

father and we his children. We can nurse him and love him! Oh, if only he were not so far away! If you could only tell me where he is I would write to him and get his permission to make the journey. Otherwise we can't do a thing because Mr. von Stieli, in Hanover, wishes Salo to study for years and years. We have to do as he says, but our uncle would have the right to summon us. Please do tell me where he is!" she pleaded.

"But what of the privations of living with an old uncle, the lonesomeness, and nothing for a home but a rocky nest with an old sick man in it?" he snapped out.

"Oh, but it would be so grand to have a home of my own with a loving uncle and Salo too!" continued Leonore with unabated longing. "There would be only one thing lacking, but I shall miss that anyhow when I go back to Hanover."

"What is that?"

"Aunt Maxa and all her children."

"Shall we ask this Aunt Maxa what she thinks about it? Would that suit you, child?" he inquired.

"Oh, yes, certainly!" answered Leonore.

At the mention of Aunt Maxa, she suddenly recalled that she did not know where they were, and they had been gone a long time, so she said they must depart at once and held out her hand to Mazli.

"Perhaps you will carry a message, Leonore," he said. "Tell your Aunt Maxa that the master of the castle whom she knew so well would be glad to visit her but he cannot get about, and might he hope that she would climb up to the old castle some day?"

As Mazli stretched out her hand in good-bye she noticed the cushion had slipped down again and said, "Apollonie would just love to put things in order, but Mr. Trius won't let her in. She would gladly give a finger of her right hand if she could attend to everything that Mr. Trius does not do."

"Come, Mazli!" urged Leonore, for she felt this strange information might be followed by more equally obscure. But the castle-steward smiled a queer little smile as though he understood.

Mrs. Maxa and all her children were standing in front of the house anxiously looking for the two missing ones when the blue ribbon on

Leonore's hat fluttered into sight. The children darted off to meet them.

"Where have you been? Why did you stay so long?" was asked from all sides.

"In the castle," was the answer, at which the excitement became even greater.

"How did you ever get in?"

"Who let you in?"

"What did you do in the castle?"

Everyone talked at once, but Mazli's voice was heard above the din, for she wished her words to carry well and replied loudly, "It's not the first time I've visited the castle-steward. I've been quite often!"

Leonore had gone ahead, her arm linked in Mrs. Maxa's, for she was eager to deliver her message.

Kurt's interest in Mazli's expedition to the castle was too great for him to be satisfied with an unintelligible report, but the two did not make much progress, for when Mazli spoke first about Mr. Trius and then about the castle-steward, Kurt said sharply, "They are one and the same person: don't make two of them. Mr. Trius is castle-steward of Wildenstein, all the world knows that!"

But Mazli insisted, "Mr. Trius is one man and the castle-steward another. That makes two, not one!"

After they had gotten that far three times, Bruno commanded, "Stop, Kurt! Mazli only means that some call the man Mr. Trius, and some call him the castle-steward."

But Mazli ran off, still loudly insisting, "There are two! I tell you there are two!"

Leonore delivered her message. "He did not say from the castle-steward, as he called himself to Mazli, but from the master of the castle whom you once knew very well," continued Leonore. "Oh, just think, Aunt Maxa, if we could find our Uncle! You will help so we can write to him?"

Mrs. Maxa had listened with growing excitement and now her silence passed unnoticed because Mea exclaimed sadly, "Oh, Leonore, if you go to Spain, we'll never see you again!"

"A journey to Spain is not quickly undertaken, children," said the mother, "and I am sure you need not think about it."

After a much belated supper, Mrs. Maxa sent all the children off to bed and sat down to think over the message of the master of the castle.

What hopes could she build on it? Did he merely wish to talk over Leonore's situation? But all her thinking led nowhere, and at last she lay down with the full assurance that the One who had opened the long-closed castle could also open the heart that had been closed so many years in bitterness.

CHAPTER IX

IN THE CASTLE

THE next afternoon Mrs. Maxa approached the castle gate which was suddenly opened by Mr. Trius who made a deep bow, hat in hand.

"May I see the Baron?" she asked.

With another bow he led the visitor up the hill, announced her, and with a third bow invited her to step forward. It was plain to be seen he had received orders to change his usual gruff manner.

The invalid stretched out his hand and said, "Have you really come, Mrs. Maxa? Didn't an ancient grudge against the evil-doer hold you back?"

Pressing the proffered hand, she replied, "It is a great joy that you have opened your door to me, Baron. How I have wished I might be allowed to serve you! I know nothing about an ancient grudge. All who have belonged to this beloved castle have borne grief and pain."

"I have returned to the old den to die," said he. "I am a broken man, as you see. I only

wished to let the past be forgotten and die in solitude, as I thought I ought. Then your little daughter forced her way in; how, I do not know."

"I beg you to forgive the child's rashness," Mrs. Maxa implored. "How she got into the castle garden puzzles me. I knew nothing about it until last evening when the two children came home. I fear Mazli has annoyed you with her visits."

"No, the child has not; she is the true child of her mother," said the Baron. "She at once wanted to bring me what I needed. She loves Leonore so much, she wanted me to know her. But I cannot understand what that child wants. She begged me to tell her how to reach her uncle for she wishes to make her home with him and love him as a father. She wants to go to him, no matter where he is. What is to be done?" he asked.

"Oh, Baron, there is only one thing to do," replied the lady in ecstasy. "The dear God led the child to your house. Now she belongs to you, so take her. You must become her father and let her love and care for you. You will soon discover what a treasure she is, and you will

grow young again for she will bring back the lovely old days."

The Baron smiled and said, "Our Maxa always saw the ideal. But why should this tender child live in such an empty, desolate castle as this with no one but a miserable wreck and his old watchman? No, that is impossible! The child longs for a home. Will you not keep her —she has found it home in your house already. She can learn who her uncle is and visit him sometimes."

"I love Leonore as though she were my own child, and have thought I had no greater desire than to keep her with me," she began, "but now I think otherwise. She and her brother belong to you, the castle is their home, and Leonore should surround you with her loving influence and thus gladden your heart. When you have her, you will realize of what a treasure I would have robbed you. Many of the loved ones are gone, but in spite of that the castle should not be so empty and desolate. Life here can be as happy as when you forsook it. Your blessed mother always looked for your return and wanted the castle unchanged after she had gone. Leonore can have her rooms and be the mistress."

"Will you not look over the rooms you knew so well?" asked the Baron resignedly.

"May I go everywhere?"

"Certainly!"

Her heart fluttered as she stepped into the great hall where she had played as a child. Everything was unchanged—the great stone table in the center, the stone benches along the walls, the statues of the old knights of Wildenstein in the niches.

She went into the dining-hall. How cold and bare! The portraits of the ancestors were gone, and the shining pewter; even the pitchers and goblets had been taken from the great open sideboard. Mrs. Maxa shook her head.

Going upstairs, she first stepped into the Baron's own room, but paused at the door in dismay. What a room! Not a picture on the bare walls, not even a small rug on the floor. Just a bed, an old cane chair and a table from the servants' quarters; that was all. Mrs. Maxa looked again. Yes, it was his room, the balcony room in the tower. But where did the Baron now sleep?

She could stand the sight no longer, and hurried off to the room of the Baroness. All

gone—the red velvet armchairs, the sofa in the corner, the children's pictures above it! Only the bare bedstead in the corner.

She rushed to Leonore's room, the beloved room with the beautiful pictures, the chairs with light blue silk covers, the curved sofa in the corner, the little writing-desk with its two vases of fresh roses. All empty, bare, dusty; only the tiny pink and blue flowers of the wallpaper spoke of the happy past. She turned quickly and merely glanced into the great drawing-room. What had become of the costly damask-covered furniture? Had the castle been looted and no one knew it? Perhaps Mr. Trius did not know what had once been there, and it was plain to be seen the Baron had not troubled himself about it.

Hurrying back to him, she exclaimed, "You unfortunate Bruno! Your mother never desired this! What must your feelings have been to find things so! It is beyond my comprehension."

"But not beyond mine," said the Baron calmly. "I had thought it would be so. Did I value it when I owned it all? It is only justice that desolation and emptiness should surround me

here. I came back to die, and I can await death under the pine by day and in my relic of a room at night. But death does not come as quickly as I thought."

"The dear Lord has other plans for you, I am sure," said Mrs. Maxa forcibly. "I can see it is best for Leonore to stay with us for the present, and I am glad I have your permission. But may I inform the Remke ladies that Leonore is not to leave me without your instructions to that effect?"

When the Baron had given his hearty consent to this, she said, "Of course you remember Apollonie, the faithful servant of the castle for so many years?"

"Yes, indeed, and your little daughter has already brought me news about her."

"She is the only soul who might know what has happened up here," continued Mrs. Maxa. "I am going to her at once, and should she come, I beg you to admit her. If the castle has been robbed you must let me get what you need. You need to be looked after, and I know your mother would have wished me to do so."

"I think so too," said the Baron with a smile, "and I ought to be obedient."

Mrs. Maxa now departed, but not without securing permission to come again in a few days. She found Apollonie at work in her little

garden and plunged into a description of the devastation of the castle.

"The Turk, the savage! That old heathen of a Trius!" Apollonie sobbed in anger and sorrow. "That is why he never answered my questions! I have asked again and again if he had found the bedding, the pieces marked with the blue crowns in the corners, but he would only grin at me. He never even searched for them, and the

master has had to suffer for it! Everything is there, even his smallest keepsakes! But he had to come home to desolation and emptiness. It was not without reason I lay sleepless night after night because I could not go up there to put things in order. But I did not suppose things could be so bad, and I am to blame for it, I am to blame for it!"

Under pressure Apollonie at last told Mrs. Maxa how all this had happened. When Baron Bruno had returned for his first short visit and learned of his brother's marriage and his mother's death, he journeyed off again and she had the impression he would not return for a long time. Fearing thieves might visit the deserted castle or time alone ravish its furnishings, she had stored them in the great garret rooms, taking care to protect them in sheets and to lock the doors. She felt sure they would be well preserved, and never doubted that she would be summoned immediately the Baron returned, for she belonged to the castle as always. But everything had happened otherwise.

"I must go up there without a moment's delay! Before another night passes, the master's room must be put in order. But how can I get

in while that stubborn watchman is always on duty?"

Mrs. Maxa declared the Baron would see to that and again urged her to go up immediately before she left her.

Leonore knew where Mrs. Maxa had gone and ran to meet her, asking anxiously, "Oh, Aunt Maxa, did he give you the address?"

"He promised that you shall have it as soon as he learns it."

That was hopeful anyhow, and Leonore sat down at once to write happily to her brother, while Mrs. Maxa wrote to the ladies in Hanover, telling them Leonore's uncle had returned and wished his niece to stay near him for several weeks.

Meanwhile Apollonie hurried up the mountain, spurred on with the hope of entering the castle. Would the gate really be open? She rang the bell. Mr. Trius appeared, spoke no word, opened the gate and went silently away. She hurried to the terrace and at sight of the invalid ran forward, crying, "O Baron, Baron! I am to blame that you found neither bed nor room in order!"

The Baron shook her hand heartily, saying,

"Well, now, Mrs. Apollonie, what is the matter? We were always good friends, so what are you blaming yourself for?"

Apollonie now repeated the story as she had told it to Mrs. Maxa, and pleaded that he allow her to put his room in order that very day, and one room each day thereafter until the castle was as it used to be.

When the Baron answered that she could do what she thought best, for what his mother had wished must be right, Apollonie ran up to the garret chambers as blissfully as though going to some great festival. Soon she came down laden with blankets and cushions and coverings, only to climb up again for fresh loads. So it went on for several hours. At last she stood in the center of the Baron's room and gazed around. Nothing was missing. The rich hangings were ready for the Baron to pull to shut out the blinding rays of the sun. Even the pens he had last used lay on the inkstand, with the pen-wiper Leonore had embroidered with roses beside them. The cover on the snow-white bed in the corner was thrown back a little, all ready for the invalid. And above the bed hung a little picture of his mother which had been there when

he was a child. Apollonie had remembered every little detail.

Going down to the terrace where the cool evening breeze was stirring the pines, she said, "All is ready, Baron. I will help Mr. Trius carry you up. I am sure you will rest well to-night."

"Where are you going to take me?" asked the Baron in surprise. "I am all right here on the terrace."

"No, no, Baron! It is too chilly for you to stay here any longer. Your own room is ready; your blessed mother would have ordered it, I know. May I call Mr. Trius?"

Mr. Trius had good ears, and he was instantly on the spot.

"You are to carry me up," said the Baron. "Apollonie will show you how to do it."

Immediately she lifted him, saying, "You do the same, Mr. Trius, and the Baron will put one arm around my neck and the other around yours. We'll clasp hands under his knees and lift him." So the Baron was carried with ease and in comfort to his chamber.

Sinking back on the soft pillows, he looked around and said, "How comfortable this is!

Apollonie has made everything look as it did years ago!"

"Now make the Baron comfortable for the night," whispered Apollonie to Mr. Trius and went down to the kitchen.

Dust and cobwebs were everywhere. She opened the great cupboard, but found only a loaf of bread and some eggs, and further search did not reveal any more food.

"The old heathen, he gives the Baron nothing but eggs!" she burst out in anger, and, taking the keys from their old place, brought some bottles from the cellar. Wiping the thick dust off one of them, she used the old wine to make a strengthening eggnog. The Baron always had liked them. Such an inviting aroma rose from the cup when she carried it up to him that he drank it with keen zest, while she busied herself with a touch here and there.

"Ah, Baron," she said when there was really nothing more to do, "I've just been looking at the kitchen. What if the Baroness could see it! And the cellar! I can't rest until things are in order. May I work tonight, Baron?"

"No, no! You must sleep, just as I shall now; you have made my bed so comfortable," he said

smiling. "But how would it be if you came back to the castle and managed it?" Apollonie just stared at him until he added, "Well, what do you think of it?"

"Will I, Baron? Oh, such joy!" she exclaimed in ecstasy. "I'll come tomorrow morning, Baron, but—what will the Baron say? I am no longer alone; I have my daughter's child, and she is twelve years old, so not yet useful in castle or garden."

"Splendid! A second Apollonie, so that when you are too old, she can carry on your work. Move up to the castle tomorrow," and he leaned back on his pillows with such apparent satisfaction Apollonie departed to her cottage with a heart overflowing with happiness.

With the first ray of daylight next morning, she stood in front of her cottage with what she most needed piled on a cart. Loneli had just been told the great news, for she had been in bed when Apollonie reached home the night before. She was so overawed at the prospect of living in the castle that now she stood stockstill in the middle of the room.

"Come, come!" urged her grandmother. "There is work to be done today!"

"What will Kurt and Mea say?" was all Loneli could say.

"And what will their mother say?" added Apollonie gayly. "But now it is a case of getting things done. No school for you today or tomorrow, but by Sunday I hope all will be finished."

Apollonie briskly tied up her last bundle, closed the cottage door and pressed on without pausing for a single moment of rest until they reached the castle gate. This time they had to wait for Mr. Trius, and when at last he came slowly up, he growled, "Why not before daylight?"

"Because you would have been in bed!" retorted Apollonie. "But for that I would have been here then."

Apollonie was soon in the kitchen using mop and broom to clear away the cobwebs. A couple of hours, and the big kitchen looked so habitable that Mr. Trius could not hide his approval when he went in to brew some coffee for his master and himself. The only thing that usually supplemented the coffee was some dry bread. He would have had to fetch such things as milk and butter from the peasants round about, so he

preferred going without and his master never asked for anything more. Today he found steaming coffee, hot milk, and a fresh loaf of snowy bread on the newly scrubbed table, and not a single cobweb tickled his nose.

Apollonie poured the fragrant coffee and politely invited Mr. Trius to take his seat at the table. The new order of things was not at all unpleasant, and he enjoyed the meal immensely. Meanwhile Apollonie set a breakfast tray with the old china the Baroness had used. She put a little bowl of golden butter balls beside the steaming coffee pot, and fresh round rolls peeped invitingly from under the snowy napkins in a china basket.

When Apollonie placed the tray before her master, he said, "Oh, how good it looks,—just like olden times!" and declared the very sight of the food would do him good.

"Eat a little, Baron," Apollonie begged, for she did not agree with this view; "otherwise you will gain no strength. Just a tiny bite, and then another. Do me that favor, for I sent Loneli to the Oberhutten Dairy for the butter; they make the best."

With this information the Baron felt he had

to eat a little, and to his surprise found the food very tempting.

When the Baron was sitting in the morning sunshine, Apollonie brought Loneli to him that she might thank him for taking her into the castle. Then the work of cleaning and restoring all the rooms began. They ceased work only at meal times, for Apollonie did not consider meals a minor matter.

If quality of food was taken into account by the Baron, quantity was considered by Mr. Trius, for he had an excellent appetite and the new cooking pleased him. He began to give Apollonie credit for her management, and showed his gratitude by helping to carry down the heavy furniture from the garret. When Sunday arrived Apollonie had accomplished most of what she had planned to do. After she had carried her master his morning coffee, she stood irresolutely at his door.

"Well, Apollonie, I hope you have no complaint to make, for I am surely doing no injustice to your excellent coffee. Just see how my appetite has improved!"

"The Lord be thanked!" she exclaimed. "But as the Baron has asked, will you give me some

Sunday pleasure by inspecting the castle?"

He said he could not refuse to view the results of all the labor she had undertaken for his pleasure. "You are bringing strange things to pass, Apollonie," he concluded, "for that old bear Trius has been transformed into an obedient lamb."

Apollonie went off in high good humor, and soon she was pushing his wheel-chair into the great hall. The Baron, comfortably propped on his pillows, gazed about in wonder but said nothing. Then they went into the tower room which had been Salo's, but again no word. Now she took him to his mother's room, which was exactly as the Baroness had left it. She watched her master as he gazed silently on each familiar object, and waited for him to sign to her to go on.

"My mother sat in that armchair when I spoke last to her," he said, "and the red pincushion lay there on the little table, just as today. I stuck the needles into it while she talked to me. I seem to hear every word she said. Don't push me around any more today, Apollonie," he said; "I will spend my Sunday here."

Apollonie's heart leaped with joy: her master again felt at home! Oh, if he would love it again! Unable to suppress her desire, she pleaded, "If only the Baron would take one more tiny journey! You can come back immediately."

"You've accomplished wonders!" he exclaimed as they entered Leonore's chamber through whose open windows floated the caroling of birds until the room seemed filled with their song. "In two days you have changed what was a den of sadness into a pleasant abode where young people could be happy. Wheel me back into my mother's room, and when you can, come back to me; I have something to talk over with you."

And so it happened that while Loneli wandered on the terrace thinking how happy she would be to tell Kurt and Mea she was living at the castle and to ask them to visit her there, a long conversation was taking place in the upper room. Finally her grandmother called her, and when she stepped into the great chamber, she found her grandmother wiping the tears from her eyes.

"Why, grandmother," she said in surprise,

"what is the matter? It is so lovely here that all the birds are singing."

"Oh, I am singing with them at heart, but I cry from sheer joy," explained Apollonie. "Sit down, Loneli, while I tell you what is going to happen tomorrow. Oh, I feel I shall die from happiness!" and she was so overcome that it was some time before she could tell Loneli what the morrow was to bring.

Down in Mrs. Maxa's garden it was so quiet that one would scarcely suppose the entire family was in the little vine-clad summer-house. The thought that this was Leonore's last Sunday with them was responsible. Mrs. Maxa had suggested a game, but it did not cheer them. She herself was depressed because evening had come and Apollonie had not called to report what had happened when she visited the castle; more than that, she had not even sent Loneli with any word.

Mazli came back from sitting with Kathy on a bench near the front door, and said, "Here's a letter a boy just brought; it's for Leonore."

But Leonore put both hands before her eyes and begged, "Oh, Aunt Maxa, you read it; I can't."

"No bad news, children," she said, a joyful flush mantling her face. "Listen! The steward of Wildenstein desires that his friends, Leonore and Mazli, bring their entire family to spend tomorrow at Castle Wildenstein."

"That's right!" said Mazli quickly. "Then Kurt can see for himself that the castle-steward and Mr. Trius are not the same man."

It was an eager group that stood ready for the trip at ten o'clock the next morning. Bruno and Kurt headed the procession, and the pace they struck was such that their mother declared they would all arrive at the castle entirely out of breath.

When they reached the gate both wings were thrown wide open and Mr. Trius bent low in a sweeping bow. They were so surprised at this reception and to see the man wearing a coat with great silver buttons that they climbed to the terrace without a word, only to be more astonished to find a long table there decked with ivy and flowers. At that moment Apollonie came up with measured step, dressed in a silk gown her beloved Baroness had given her. She had become Castle-Apollonie! Loneli, wearing a pretty dress and carrying a huge bouquet, stepped up

LONELI HANDED HER THE FLOWERS AND REPEATED A VERSE APOLLONIE HAD COMPOSED.

to Leonore and, handing her the flowers, repeated a verse that Apollonie had composed:

"We welcome thee to this home of thine,
Mistress of Castle Wildenstein."

Leonore stared first at Loneli, then at her bouquet, while the children all stood around in speechless amazement. Taking Leonore by the hand, Mrs. Maxa led her to the Baron's chair. "I think her uncle is going to give Leonore an address she longs for," she said, putting the child's hand in his.

In a flash Leonore understood everything, and throwing her arms around his neck, she cried, "Oh, my uncle, my dear uncle! Is it really true you are my uncle? Oh, such great happiness!"

"Yes, child, I am the uncle you wished to love as a father. Speak to me, call me that, and I will be your father. Can you love me? Would you like to make your home with me, Leonore?"

"Oh, my dear, dear uncle," repeated Leonore, again embracing him, "it is not at all difficult to love you! When you told me my uncle was in Spain, as sick and as wretched as you, I thought, 'If he were just like the castle-steward I could

love him at once!' I can't really believe I may live with you, and Salo, too, in your lovely castle, so near Aunt Maxa and those I love most. Oh, what will Salo say now? May I write him a letter today to tell him we are to have a home with you?"

"Good-day, Castle-Steward!" and Mazli pushed a fat round little hand between Leonore and the Baron, for the instant her mother had let go her hand she had hastened to carry out the plan next to her heart. "Now Kurt can see for himself whether you and Mr. Trius are one person or two, can't he, Mr. Castle-Steward?" she asked in triumph.

"Yes, that must be settled," the Baron replied, shaking her hand. "We will prove to him you know what you see. Leonore, introduce your friends to me."

Leonore ran off to where Mrs. Maxa and Apollonie stood with the rest of the children who were eagerly listening to an explanation of all that had happened. They were greatly excited at the news, but at Leonore's approach, they hung back shyly until she said, "Just come along; my uncle is the dearest man in the world! You will see that at once." And they had

scarcely reached the invalid's chair when she began the introduction.

"This is Bruno, my brother's very best friend, and this is Mea, who is mine. Here is Kurt—"

"Who is *my* friend," interrupted the uncle. "I know him; he will write verses about all of us. I know the one he composed about Mr. Trius."

Kurt looked at the Baron in confusion.

"Yes, in the new verses you write you can say the castle-steward and Mr. Trius are two persons, now you have seen for yourself," declared Mazli, and immediately Kurt understood who had been the little dicky bird.

"And this is my friend Lippo," continued Leonore, "who is such a good friend that he has asked me to his own house to live when he is grown up."

"You have excellent friends, Leonore," said the Baron, "and they must come to the castle often if Mrs. Maxa will give us this pleasure."

"Gladly!" she assured him, "and the happiness you give will make your own."

"Yes, and Salo will be with us!" said Leonore. "He will soon come, won't he, uncle?"

Apollonie now announced with ceremony, "If

it be convenient to the ladies and gentlemen, the table is served."

"Instead of my taking my guest, Mrs. Maxa, to the table, I must ask who will take me," said the Baron.

"I! I! I! I! I!" echoed from every side, and many eager hands reached out to push the chair.

"This is driving a coach and six!" laughed the Baron.

Such wonderful things as Apollonie had concocted for that table! No meal ever equaled it. But when the Baron said, "Now the little birds will want to fly away through the woods and fields and to the berry bushes, and they may if they wish," that seemed to crown the feast.

"Hurrah, Leonore!" shouted Bruno. "Now the home for you and Salo is found, and what a home! And so near to us! Now we shall be together, and Salo with us."

"Hurrah for the Baron!" sang out Kurt. "Long live Castle Wildenstein!" Then suddenly interrupting his own cheering, "Where is Loneli? She ought to be with us. Wait, I'll fetch her," and he was already back on the terrace, where he found Loneli helping her grand-

mother clear the table. "Apollonie, we want Loneli with us. Let her go with me."

"Who wants her?" asked Apollonie rather severely, though with a little note of pleasure in her voice.

"All of us, and more especially Leonore," replied Kurt shyly.

"Then go, Loneli, for this is a great holiday and you must join in the festivity," and Loneli ran off with Kurt, both of them all radiant with joy.

The Baron and Mrs. Maxa sat under the old pine tree recalling the past, and Mrs. Maxa took the opportunity to tell him how faithfully his mother had written to tell him the home news. Her letters failed to reach him because he was such a wanderer, but he ought to realize how she had loved him and how she had hoped for his return.

"Mrs. Maxa," said the Baron after a long silence, "I am greatly ashamed of myself. I came back here with hatred and strife in my heart against God and man, my only wish being to die and the sooner, the better. Here where I supposed myself forgotten and despised, I meet with friendship and love and loyalty beyond

compare. How show my gratitude? How make amends when I am so guilty?"

"We know there is One who can blot out all our sins if we call on Him," she answered, and then as he remained silent, she added, "Baron Bruno, may I tell you something on the strength of our old friendship?"

"Whatever you desire! You will only say what is right."

"So far you have avoided mentioning the name of Salo. I noticed you would not answer Leonore's petitions to have him come. Bitter memories are linked with that name, but you are robbing yourself if you keep away the boy who bears that name. Let him come," she pleaded, "even if for only a short time so that you can see him! If you do not wish to see the lad who could become the pride and joy of your life, open the door of your home to him because it is right, before God, to do so."

At last the Baron said reluctantly, "Salo shall come to his home," at which Mrs. Maxa's face beamed with joy.

When the children returned at sunset, gayly decorated with garlands of ivy, poppies and cornflowers, they found the two still talking.

They quickly formed in line and it was truly a triumphal march they made to the supper table, the Baron enthroned in his chair at their head. It was no sad separation that came at the end of the merry meal, for the Baron had already told them Leonore was to move up to the castle in a few days, and from then on visits and return visits would begin. When he shook Mazli's hand in farewell, he said, "Mazli was the first to come to see me, so she remains my special friend," to which she piped a very decided, "I will!"

Leonore was the last to bid her uncle good-night, and when she whispered in his ear, "Dear uncle, may Salo soon come home?" a clear "Yes" was the answer.

Leonore's heart was so full it had to find some expression, so she exclaimed, "Oh, Aunt Maxa, could we not sing our evening hymn up here? I would so love to sing the song my mother used to sing!"

Mrs. Maxa was quite willing and, gathering around the Baron's chair, they all sang:

"Lord, Thou who doest all things well,
No gift I wish but just Thy will.
The best for us we cannot tell.
More than we ask Thou dost fulfill."

And now they took their homeward way, but just as long as the castle remained in sight, the children kept looking back, for the day had been altogether lovely.

The following day three letters went to Salo, one from Bruno, one from Leonore, both filled with ecstasy over the wonderful event, the third from Mrs. Maxa summoning him to his new home.

The news of the Baron's return spread with lightning speed far beyond Nolla and Mrs.

Knippel paid a prompt visit to Mrs. Maxa to inform her that if the son of Baron Salo was coming, she and her husband thought the best thing would be to see that he also found a room in the boarding-house where their sons and Bruno would dwell. Thus the sons of the three first families of the village would live together, a most desirable thing for all. And they were sure when it was explained that Salo was a baron's son, a room would be available even if his application was made a little late. Mrs. Maxa did not allow this to annoy her now, and calmly informed her caller that the Baron would undoubtedly make his own arrangements; he had said so. Mrs. Knippel declared this was no such obstacle as Mrs. Maxa seemed to think; her husband would talk with the Baron.

Directly after she had departed Loneli came into the house to seek Mea.

"Just think, Mea," said the peace-loving Loneli, "Elvira sends me to tell you she will be friends again, but you must see that she knows Leonore, because she wants to be her friend and sit beside her in school."

"I don't care whether she wants to be friends or not," replied Mea unmoved. "Leonore will

not go to school, and neither shall I. Just think, Loneli! A lady is coming to the castle to teach us, and you too. The Baron and mother have arranged it."

"Then I will never sit on the disgrace-bench again!" she rejoiced, her face aglow, as though her one heavy care had fallen from her shoulders.

"You may ask Leonore herself if she wants to become acquainted with Elvira," said Mea as Leonore stepped up. But Elvira's message made no impression on Leonore. All the time she did not spend with her uncle, she would pass with Mea and her family, she said. Least of all she wished to have as a friend one who had withdrawn from Mea's companionship.

Uncle Phipp had been away on a business trip, and on his return found a note from his sister asking him to come as soon as possible, that he might find Leonore still with her; she was going to the castle to live within the next few days.

He came the very next morning, and was so excited when he met his sister that he burst out, "Just as I thought, Maxa! At the first opportunity you deliver the dove to the vulture! Oh,

if only I had not turned her over to you!"

"Come, sit down with us; we are just ready to eat," said Mrs. Maxa calmly. "Ask the dove how the vulture's talons feel."

If he was filled with foreboding, the children were with joy, and he heard nothing but, "The dear, dear Baron!" "Leonore's grand uncle!" "The kind castle-steward!" for Mazli had not given up her title even now.

"You see, Phipp, you cannot swim against the stream," said Mrs. Maxa when she was alone with him after the meal. "Go visit your old friend, and you will join the circle of his admirers."

When Uncle Phipp seemed strenuously opposed to that she added, "Baron Bruno spoke of you in the tone of a friend; apparently you don't deserve it. To be sure, he added, 'But Philip will not want to have anything more to do with me,' and I could not gainsay that."

"But, Maxa, I am not the kind that pushes back the hand of an old friend when he offers it and wishes to do what is right," her brother said resentfully. "Will he give Salo's son his rights?"

"Young Salo has already been told he is to

come to the castle of his ancestors; that it is his home," explained Mrs. Maxa.

"I am going for a walk," and Uncle Phipp snatched up his hat and disappeared, though it was not difficult for Mrs. Maxa to guess what direction he would take.

When supper was ready, Uncle Phipp was still absent but he soon came in and sat down with them, glancing about with satisfaction.

"Leonore, when you are mistress at the castle I will often be your guest. I have just come from your uncle and we did some business. I told him the estate is a wilderness, and he said he didn't understand such matters, and was sick besides. I said I understand something about such things, and as I am well and have an attachment to the estate," here Uncle Phipp's voice grew hoarse. "Maxa, your plum cake is so sweet it affects my throat," he said for he would not confess his emotion. "So we have decided that I look after the estate, and I will be at the castle often."

This brought another outburst of joy in which the mother had a share, for it was her greatest desire that there should be peace between these two.

This was the last evening before Leonore went to the castle to live, but no such oppressive sadness lay on their hearts as when the journey to Hanover was ahead. The children merrily planned for the coming days when the door opened and shrieks of joy burst from every throat: "Salo! Salo! Salo!"

Without knowing that he was doing so, the boy had arrived just in time to spend the last evening with his friends before going to his new home.

Then began a time of holidays, for the Baron saw to it that each day brought new joys and pleasures.

Kurt had quickly pointed out to Salo and Bruno that there must be a great armory hall in the basement of the castle. When the boys went to Apollonie about it, she led them into it through a side door as Mr. Trius had hidden the key to the main entrance. Salo lost no time in lifting the armored knight to his shoulders, and with the long blue riding-cloak draped over him, he stalked up and down the hall. Kurt recognized in the frightful giant knight the ghost of Wildenstein he had seen that night in the woods, though he confided his discovery to Loneli alone.

Salo's winning manners quickly captivated his uncle so that he took a keen interest in his nephew's education and decided that from now on Salo and Bruno should pursue their studies together. When the summer holidays were over, the boys journeyed to the city to school, but there was no sad farewell, for they were to spend many Sundays as well as all the longer holidays at home. Bruno soon wrote his mother she need not worry at all about his settling accounts with the Knippel boys; he never came in touch with them. Mrs. Maxa recalled all her fears and forebodings, and she said with thankful heart:

"The best for us we cannot tell.
More than we ask Thou dost fulfill."

Apollonie, now truly Castle-Apollonie, lived at peace with Mr. Trius, doing so for her master's sake. Under her watchful care both the Baron and Leonore gained in strength and on sunny days they wandered to and fro on the castle terrace, his young companion always trying with tender care to keep him from fatigue. These days a sweet song was often heard through the open windows of the castle, for

Leonore had inherited her mother's voice and her uncle rejoiced to hear the songs of bygone days. And the people in Nolla said, "The ghost of Wildenstein has disappeared because peace reigns at the castle."

THE END